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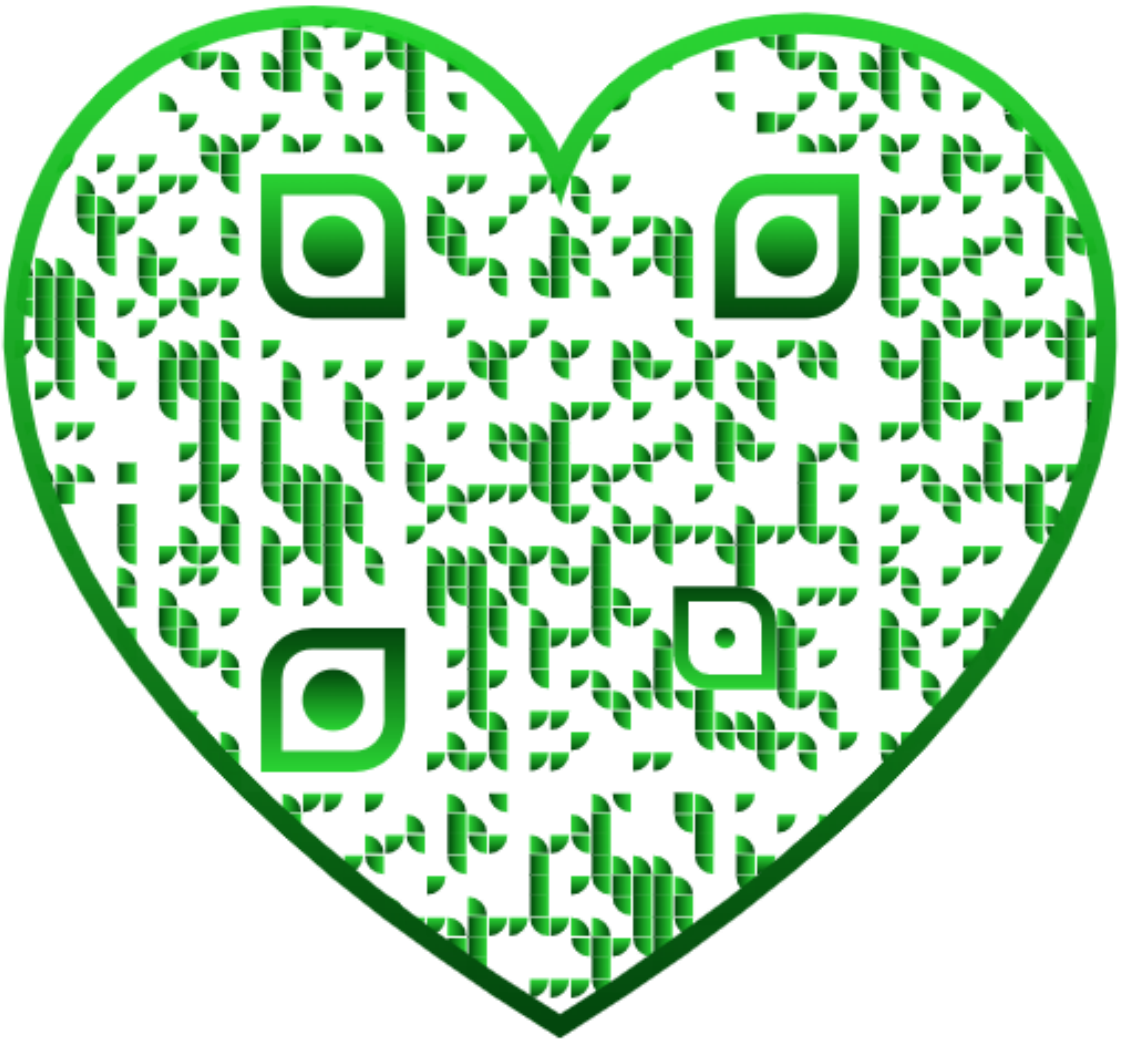

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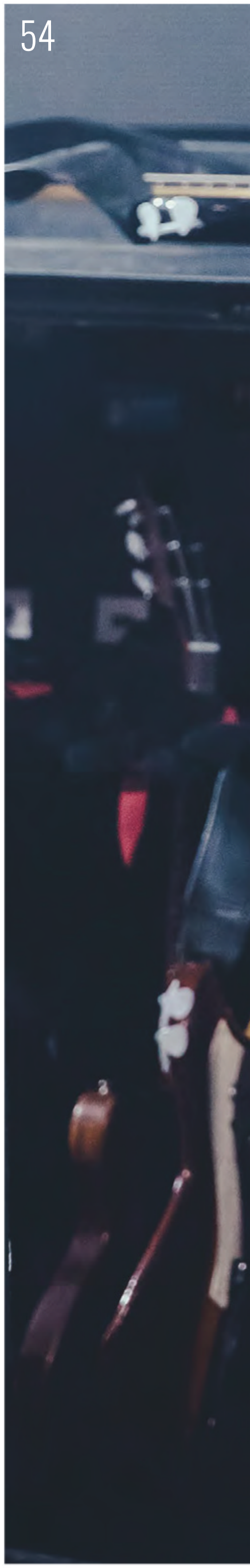
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EDITOR'S LETTER

HIGHLY EVOLVED

We guitarists often stand accused of being obsessed with the past, but this month's magazine devotes a healthy chunk of real estate to the future. As well as taking a deep dive into Fender's new top-of-the-line American Ultra series and the company's ongoing search for the next great guitar to stand side-by-side with Leo's most iconic designs, we've also assembled a panel of industry luminaries and quizzed them about where they see the guitar heading in 2020 and beyond.

Paul Reed Smith, Taylor Master Guitar Designer and partner Andy Powers, Executive Vice President of Fender Products Justin Norvell… these are all names most of you will be familiar with, but what do you think is the one aspect of guitar manufacture that Paul Smith says will never be carried out by a machine? How does Andy Powers approach the challenge of working with new timbers? What does Justin Norvell think will be the most significant trends in guitar gear over the next few years?

These are the individuals at the top of the food chain when it comes to mainstream guitar innovation, and their thoughts make for fascinating reading. But I'm equally interested in hearing the opinions of the people who make the wheels of the guitar industry turn, and that's you, and thousands like you.

What do you predict for the guitar over the coming decade? What's the one product that doesn't currently exist that you'd like to see go in production? Who are the next-generation guitar players who are pushing musical boundaries with our beloved instrument? Drop me a line or join the debate on our social media channels to make your voice heard.

Finally, before I pack my toothbrush, passport and a change of socks and head off to Anaheim for Winter NAMM 2020 – stay glued to *Guitar.com* for all the latest from the show floor from 16 January – make sure you turn straight to p80 to find out how to enter this month's amazing competition to win a Gibson Made 2 Measure Les Paul worth over £5,000. Good luck – it's a truly astonishing prize. I'll see you next month with mild sunburn and the sound of sweep picking still ringing in my ears…

Chris Vinnicombe
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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

A Martin D-28's loudness is a winner – see *Got The Power*

HIT RECORD

I really enjoyed your Gear Of The Decade feature issue 376, and agreed with pretty much all your choices. The Strymon BigSky was perhaps not the choice I'd have made, but it's a good example of the wider trend of big, powerful (and expensive) stompboxes that contain more and better sounds than we could have ever dreamed of even 15 years ago.

One thing I did think you missed, however, was increasing affordability of quality compact recording interfaces. While these aren't necessarily 'guitar' devices by intent, there's little doubt that desktop recording interfaces like the UA Apollo have made it easier than ever for guitarists to sound great at home – at the end of the day if we're not making music, what's all this for?

JAMES GREENVILLE, VIA EMAIL

GOT THE POWER

Dear GM, just read your gear of the decade feature, and thought I'd give my two cents. For me, there are two acoustic guitars that I've played over the last few years that have really stood out as being uncommonly good and important. You've already covered Taylor's wonderful V-Class bracing in the feature, and I can't say enough about the Taylor 914ce Limited Edition Sinker Redwood. But what beats it as my number one? It has to be the Martin D-28 Modern Deluxe. I needed a guitar loud enough for my dad to hear without his hearing aids, and this was it!

HOWARD HAINES, VIA EMAIL

FROM SOCIAL MEDIA

Great news about John Frusciante rejoining the Red Hot Chili Peppers – can't wait to see that SG2000 out on the road again!

LEIF JOHAN FLORNES, FACEBOOK

Lovely video of the Tone Master vs '65 Deluxe Reverb shootout! In a gig situation, the only way you could tell the difference would be if the guitarist was wincing with a bad back…

NIGEL SEED, YOUTUBE

There's nothing better than tubes for tone, but I have no interest in carrying any more gear than I absolutely have to when performing. I also gave zero desire to dial-in tone when I get to a venue. So a while back, I started running direct, using only a pedalboard-mounted modelling set-up and have never been happier! I'm in the door, carrying all of my gear for the night in a single trip, and completely set up in under five minutes!

AARON DAVID HOLST, FACEBOOK

I think High Flying Birds sound better than Oasis, so whatever Noel's doing there, he should keep up the good work!

ROD BUTLER, INSTAGRAM

Richard Hawley is a national treasure – how he isn't better known by the mainstream media is a mystery to me.

BANJO 75, YOUTUBE

The 1953 ES-295 from Vintage Bench Test is a thing of beauty. But that trapeze affair would have the intonation fanatics among us losing sleep!

ANDREW PITTS, FACEBOOK

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ONES TO WATCH

OSCAR JEROME

WORDS SAM ROBERTS

His music has drawn a global audience before the release of his debut album – meet one of the jazz world's most interesting new talents…

From playing with the collective Kokoroko to touring Australia, Oscar Jerome's penchant for melody is drawing people in swathes. The Norfolk-born guitarist has found his spiritual home in London's kaleidoscopic jazz scene alongside peers such as Sons Of Kemet and Ezra Collective. Despite releasing his debut EP as recently as 2016, Jerome has already had the privilege of sharing the stage with Lianne La Havas and none other than Kamasi Washington.

A product of the Trinity Laban Conservatoire, which includes Fela Kuti and Tom Misch in its alumni, his continued support has come from Annie Mac, BBC Radio 6 Music and a tour consisting of sold-out shows from the US to Rotterdam.

With his debut album still in the works, he's chosen to first release a concert album, *Live In Amsterdam*, believing that the energy and improvisation of his band is pivotal to his sound and difficult to capture in a studio. Here he tells us how it all started, from old Univox guitars to the influence of John Martyn…

What first drew you to playing guitar?

"My dad plays guitar, we always had guitars around the house. He taught me to play a couple of blues licks and I was hooked."

Your first self-titled EP came in 2016, with *What Are Your Branches?* following in 2018. How did you develop as a songwriter over those two recordings?

"When I was making the first EP, I was a lot more into hip-hop. On the second EP, I started focusing on drums as a way to give the song its initial identity; I tried having more interesting drum beats. I also explored my guitar playing a lot more on the second EP, as I felt it wasn't really represented so much on the first."

Why did you choose to release a live album before a full-length debut?

"We have been gigging a lot with this band and I started to realise that the versions of the songs we play live can be very different. We like to switch things up and improvise. I play with some great musicians and there is a certain energy we get that is very hard to put across in the studio. I felt it was important for people to hear this on record before I made another studio project, as it is an equal part of what we do."

Tell us more about your influences. There's definitely a jazz and hip-hop crossover vibe in your music…

"I love all sorts of music. I studied jazz guitar, some of my top jazz-musician influences are George Benson, Wes Montgomery, John Scofield, Freddie Hubbard, John Coltrane, the list goes on and on…

"Some of my favourite lyricists are Gil Scott-Heron, Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell and MF Doom. John Martyn has been a massive influence, especially the way he creates beautiful melancholy. I love a lot of West African music too like Ali Farka Touré and Ebo Taylor. Plus Erykah Badu and Flying Lotus. Goldie and Steel Pulse have also been influential, I could go on forever, to be honest!"

How has spending time playing with jazz collective Kokoroko helped shape your own musical output?

"I've learned a lot from playing in that band, they are all great musicians. It's helped me learn to sit in a groove a lot better. I think it has made me think a lot more intently about how each part of the music intertwines together, too."

Tell us more about the single *Lizard Street*. It opens with string arrangements, is that another element you're aiming to develop?

"*Lizard Street*, I suppose, is slightly different to some of my previous work, a bit more dark and introspective. That is actually on a Mellotron keyboard, so I had you fooled! But, yes, I have used strings on some tracks like *Evil Song* and *Chromatic Descendants*. I would like to write more for larger ensembles, definitely."

What's your go-to guitar and amplifier setup at the moment? We've seen you using both hollowbodies and an old Univox recently.

"At the moment I'm mostly playing a Gibson ES-330 with a Fender Hot Rod Deluxe amp. That Univox is actually my Dad's, he got it second-hand. He kindly has donated it to me though, thanks Dad! I also used to play this handmade archtop made by Christopher Eccleshall, that's my favourite instrument I have ever owned, made the same year I was born! But it's very delicate and currently has a snapped neck so I'm waiting to get it out of the shop. I used to play that guitar a lot with a Polytone Mini-Brute amp but that died on me and I can't find a new chip for the circuit board. Anyone got a link? Help me out!"

You've toured everywhere from Europe to Australia. What is it about your music that resonates with a global audience?

"I suppose the concentration on the music and instrumentation as a whole, not just the vocals, makes it transferable to a lot of people that don't necessarily understand everything I'm saying in the lyrics. There seems to be a lot of love for UK music in general at the moment, too. I suppose me taking a lot of influence from a lot of different genres from around the globe plays into that swell."

Finally, what does the future hold for Oscar Jerome?

"More music, more growth! I'm just trying to keep growing as a person, live in the moment and enjoy the ride." G

Oscar Jerome's *Live in Amsterdam* is out now under license to Caroline International

"I USED TO PLAY THIS HANDMADE ARCHTOP MADE BY CHRISTOPHER ECCLESHALL – THAT'S MY FAVOURITE INSTRUMENT I HAVE EVER OWNED, MADE THE SAME YEAR I WAS BORN!"

THE PLAYLIST

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

KEYS
BRING ME THE HEAD OF JERRY GARCIA

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Cardiff's resident psych-rock heroes return with their mostly-live new album, featuring Boy Azooga's Davey Newington

Formed in 2002 as The Keys, following a poll asking fans to name the band, Matthew Evans has developed KEYS into one of Wales's most formidable bands. Their new album, *Bring Me The Head Of Jerry Garcia*, offers a fresh perspective for the band, not least due to the addition of the mastermind behind Boy Azooga, Davey Newington, who's been recruited on drums and percussion.

Recorded over just two days in Resolven Miner's Welfare Institute in South Wales, the process allowed the band to capture the vitality their live shows are renowned for, while also giving them the freedom to develop new musical vocabularies. It's apt; including their early incarnation as Murray The Hump, KEYS have been a project for over 20 years now. Frontman Matthew Evans said the initial idea for the writing process for this outing was "we don't want anyone to like it. It was an amusing and liberating stance and I recommend anyone to adopt this posture in the early stages of a project." Here, he picks out his favourite guitar parts from the album.

I ONLY WANT YOU FOR YOUR ROCK AND ROLL

"Most of the songs were recorded live with little or no overdubs. *I Only Want You For Your Rock And Roll* has none; it was all done live. I think the feel is so much more intense as a result. Gwion (Rowlands') lead break is one of the wildest things I've ever heard. We almost always use our Fender Hot Rod Deluxes in a clean setting with tonnes of reverb then distort this in post using Soundtoys' Decapitator – it brings up all the lovely reverb tones as they get distorted too; all the harmonics come alive."

BROKEN BONES

"This is another one with all live guitars. I'm really proud of this lead break. I don't get much chance to do lead as it's usually Gwion's domain, but I really went deep into this one. I think it's in D Mixolydian.

"We recorded at an old miner's institute tucked away in the Neath Valley. We set up on the stage as a full band and this track was again done in one take. This was the first time we'd all played this song in its entirety, and it felt amazing. Yes, there's mistakes there but the feel was tremendous. Jimmy Page leaves all his mistakes in – if it's good enough for Jimmy it's good enough for us! "

LEAF MOUNDS

"This one does have an additional guitar overdub. We used Stef's (the engineer) baritone guitar. He's put some flatwound strings on it too so it's a really dark tone. We played it through my Fredric Super Unpleasant Fuzz pedal which is a clone of the old Japanese Shin-Ei fuzz pedals. It's the greatest sound on earth and filthy enough to make you believe in God! We should use it more. It gave us that early Sabbath sound we were looking for."

PUSSYFOOTING/(GARETH BALE) KILLED MY SCENE

"Guitar-wise, this was interesting for me. We were going for a Tim Presley aka White Fence psych thing here and it just wasn't spacey enough on the instrumental section. Stef, the engineer, suggested using a guitar amp simulator – Guitar Rig. I'd never really had much joy with these in the past. I was pleasantly surprised at how well the amp sim sounds blended in the mix. So all that spacey stuff is DI guitar put through an amp sim!"

BLACK AND WHITE

"Again, there's just one over overdub on this: the Ron Asheton wah-style during the outro. We did this at Charlotte Church's studio for some reason. Came out good. The main lead break by Gwion was done live. Gwion likes to mess about with his delay settings whilst playing this lead line, to create that de-tuned thing. It's the closest we ever want to get to Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood!"

Bring Me The Head Of Jerry Garcia **by KEYS is out now on Libertino Records**

This month's essential tracks for guitar lovers…

PHOEBE BRIDGERS
7 O'Clock News/Silent Night

Continuing a tradition of festive releases that began back in 2017, Bridgers enlists Matt Berninger and Fiona Apple for this Simon & Garfunkel cover. Baritone guitar and impeccable harmonies abound.

SAM FENDER
All Is On My Side

A mainstay of Fender's live set, this has now been released officially as a studio recording. Its chorus-drenched guitars are reminiscent of The War On Drugs, and it arguably should have featured on his hit album.

TAME IMPALA
Posthumous Forgiveness

A preview of fourth TI LP *The Slow Rush*, the new single from Kevin Parker is a sprawling psychedelic trip that pays homage to his father, turning to more melodic territory around the four minute mark.

THE FAMILY RAIN
Radiator

The Bath-based trio have returned following a hiatus which saw them reform temporarily as Voyages. *Radiator* is a romping, bluesy track with Will Walter's signature vocals and tension throughout.

BOMBAY BICYCLE CLUB
Everything Else Has Gone Wrong

BBC have released the title track from their forthcoming new album, their first in six years. It opens with fuzzy bass hooks before melancholic synths and monotone vocals enter.

BLOSSOMS
The Keeper

Reminiscent of mid-90s pomp, the second single from *Foolish Loving Spaces* is an upbeat piano-laced single that lends itself perfectly to festival crowds and summer evenings alike.

THE SHINS
When I Goose-Step

Available again for the first time in 20 years as part of the Sub Pop Singles Club, this rare cut is streaming now and also out as a limited 7-inch. It's classic Shins, with lo-fi drums and chimey, 60s-inspired guitar.

OSCAR JEROME
Do You Really – Live In Amsterdam

Jerome is the subject of this month's Ones To Watch on p14 of this issue, and this live rendition of his 2018 single is proof of his jazz playing prowess. Discover why he's one of the best new guitar players in the UK.

KEITH URBAN
Parallel Line

Urban is the star of this issue's Guitar Interview, revelling in his love of guitars and the tireless work ethic that's got him to the summit of pop-country. Turn to p54 for the full story.

DEAP LIPS
Hope Hell High

This supergroup of sorts – formed by The Flaming Lips and Deap Vally – sound as good as you'd expect. Replete with Steven Drozd synth parts and digital drum burbles, it's reminiscent of *The Soft Bulletin*.

EOB
Brasil

The second track from the Radiohead man after *Santa Teresa*, this nine-minute epic features Colin Greenwood and the motorik arpeggios lean more towards his rock influences than to *A Moon Shaped Pool*.

KHRUANGBIN & LEON BRIDGES
Texas Sun

Released in December, the title track from a forthcoming collaborative EP features trademark Thai funk from the trio whilst also lending Bridges' sultry vocals to the mix for a truly left-field sound. Bliss.

WIN A BOSS KATANA-50 MKII
WORTH £237

Boss has been renowned for making affordable, industry standard stompboxes for decades now, but the last few years have seen the company make significant forays into the world of guitar amplification. Four years on from its first iteration, the digital Katana range has a fresh lick of paint, with updated effects and functionality

The main advances are in tonal flexibility: there's now a 'variation' option for each of the five amp types, effectively giving you 10 to choose from. The effects section has also been redesigned so you can use up to five at once instead of three. Imagine trying to cram 10 amps into the back of your car…

We said: "With the output set to 50 watts, a Telecaster on the clean setting floods the room with pure 'valve amp' tone. The two high-gain amp models are just as good, with 'brown' offering an irresistible shortcut to 80s hair metal. The software opens up loads more options with over 60 effects in total, ensuring you have every pedal imaginable at your fingertips, including discontinued Boss stompboxes.

"For bedroom jams, rehearsals and even full-blown gigging, the Katana-50 MkII covers all grounds with aplomb."

When was the Boss Katana range first released?

a) 2010 **b)** 2016 **c)** 2019

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FENDER

AMERICAN ULTRA TELECASTER & STRATOCASTER HSS

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

They may have Fender's golden era in their DNA, but these high-performance instruments have been built for contemporary players who want to make music on their own terms

For 2020, Fender's flagship American Elite line has been superseded by a new series: American Ultra. Although American Elite instruments were only introduced to the catalogue at Winter NAMM 2016, at the launch of Fender's Songs learning app in New York back in October, Fender CEO Andy Mooney explained that the company had streamlined its product lifecycle from seven to four years. Leo would probably have approved – he was certainly not an individual keen on standing still.

With the Elites well and truly knocked off their perch, the Ultras now represent not only the most premium instruments made in Fender's Corona facility outside of the Custom Shop, but also the most modernistic current production models. Like the Elite series, the Ultra series includes SSS and HSS Strats and a solidbody Telecaster, but the American Elite Telecaster Thinline exits stage left and is

replaced by the American Ultra Jazzmaster. It's a smart move given the current omnipresence of offset-body guitars. What's less smart – if you are a leftie – is the lack of left-handed Ultra models at launch. Hopefully some will be announced soon.

"The goal with the Ultra series is to create an instrument of immediate and maximum inspiration, making the guitar not be in the way," says Justin Norvell, EVP of Fender Products. It's interesting to note that the Stratocaster's curvaceous form was designed in response to players who complained that the Telecaster's contour-free, single-cutaway body 'got in their way', yet the popularity of Leo's workmanlike slab endured regardless.

In recent times, attempts to further refine the Stratocaster and streamline the Tele have been numerous and widespread. But if a guitar comes with a Fender logo on its headstock, the sense of responsibility must weigh heavy during the design process. When it comes to striking the right balance for American Ultra, Andy Mooney draws parallels with how a modern high-performance Porsche 911 retains the DNA of the designs first sketched out by Ferdinand Alexander Porsche in 1959.

Justin Norvell agrees. "The idea of modifying the body shapes is not one that we take lightly," he asserts. "The body of the Stratocaster and Telecaster hasn't really manifestly been modified or changed in over 30 years and you've got to retain the essence and the spirit of the original mission of the instruments. You can look at [an Ultra] from the front and say that's a Stratocaster, or that's a Telecaster. The back – where it is actually worn against your body, where your hands do go when you go up high on the neck – that's kind of the real estate where we chose to make some of those modifications."

So is it a case of business-as-usual out front, party in the back? Removing our review guitars from their stackable, moulded hard cases reveals that the asymmetric heel idea has been carried over from the Elite series, but now the heel tapers to approximately 13mm at its thinnest point under the neck plate. Now there's much less bulk between your fingertips and palm when executing bends at the 22nd fret on those extended fingerboards. There's also a sizeable scoop removed from behind each guitar's treble cutaway, which further eases the ride.

18+

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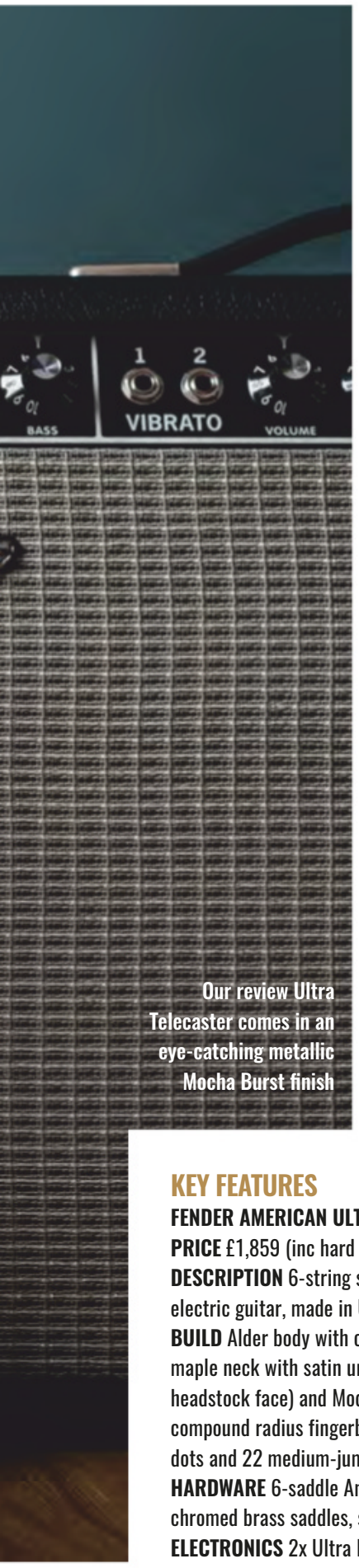

Our review Ultra Telecaster comes in an eye-catching metallic Mocha Burst finish

Fender regards its Ultra Noiseless pickups as its best ever

Both Tele and Strat feature a streamlined heel joint and scooped rear cutaway

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

KEY FEATURES

FENDER AMERICAN ULTRA TELECASTER
PRICE £1,859 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string solidbody single-cutaway electric guitar, made in USA
BUILD Alder body with cream binding, bolt-on maple neck with satin urethane finish (gloss on headstock face) and Modern D profile, 10-14" compound radius fingerboard with black pearloid dots and 22 medium-jumbo frets. Bone nut
HARDWARE 6-saddle American Tele bridge with chromed brass saddles, short-post locking tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Ultra Noiseless Vintage Tele pickups, master volume (S-1 switch), master tone, 3-way blade pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 42.9mm at nut, 51.8mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.8mm at first fret, 22.4mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 34.9mm at nut, 51.3mm at bridge
WEIGHT 7.4lb/3.4kg
FINISH Mocha Burst gloss polyurethane (as reviewed), Butterscotch Blonde, Cobra Blue, Plasma Red Burst, Texas Tea, Arctic Pearl, Ultraburst. See website for maple/rosewood fingerboard options, scratchplate colours and ash/alder body wood availability
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT fender.com

9/10 **This well-sorted Telecaster for the modern age provides a smoother ride but still has soul**

Does subtracting mass in this structurally important area negatively impact tone? It certainly doesn't seem so. Both guitars are acoustically vibrant with a long, even decay and plenty of harmonic interest – all the right ingredients for an impressive amplified performance, but more on that later.

Other body sculpting is as expected, with the Stratocaster featuring the plunging ribcage contour and forearm chamfer that Fender got so spectacularly right back in 1954. The Telecaster also gains a little huggability thanks to a substantial belly-cut of its own. The Ultra series features a sparkling range of new metallic finishes mixed with these heavily contoured bodies in mind, with several of the colours taking on slightly different hues depending on light conditions. There's real depth to these finishes, and the Cobra Blue and bound Mocha Burst showcased by our review guitars won plenty of fans in the office.

In an effort to make the American Ultras as comfortable a drive as possible, plenty of work has been done on the necks. The Telecaster's maple 'board and the Strat's rich rosewood slab have had their edges rolled, while the compound C-D neck carve of the Elite series has been ditched in favour of a 'Modern D' profile finished in a new 'Ultra satin' urethane. Both guitars have Bi-Flex truss-rods with access points behind their bone nuts – dispensing with the adjustment wheel that could be found at the end of Elite series fretboards. Which of those solutions you favour is a matter of personal preference, but we can all agree they both provide easier access for neck

The Ultra Noiseless single-coil pickups on the Strat are Hot models

The HSS-spec'd Ultra Stratocaster in bold Cobra Blue

Vintage fans may notice the shorter skirts on the Strat's knobs

relief tweaks than having to pop the neck off, vintage-style.

Fender has now gone through five generations of its Noiseless pickups but it regards the new Ultra Noiseless units as the best it has ever produced. In-house tone guru Tim Shaw has again bought his vast R&D experience to bear and there are two flavours on offer: the Ultra Noiseless Vintage – as sported by the Telecaster – and the Ultra Noiseless Hot, seen here in combination with a zebra-coil Ultra Double Tap humbucker on the HSS Strat.

IN USE

Experienced players tend to have rather visceral reactions to neck shapes but it's important to remember that what initially feels inviting might not seem quite so comfortable an hour into a 90-minute live set… however, that's probably a bigger discussion for another day. The American Ultra Modern D, aided by broken 'board edges and a sleek urethane finish, is just one of those neck profiles that's tough to dislike, stays comfortable for long periods of playing and doesn't paint you into a stylistic corner as a big deep V or U-shape might.

There are D-profiles out there with flatter backs and fuller shoulders, but you soon forget about nomenclature and measurements once you start auditioning either of these guitars.

In combination with medium-jumbo frets, the compound 10-14-inch radius does its job without feeling excessively flat or jarringly modern. Despite our best efforts while executing some huge high-

KEY FEATURES

FENDER AMERICAN ULTRA STRATOCASTER HSS
PRICE £1,859 (inc. hard case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string solidbody double-cutaway electric guitar, made in USA
BUILD Alder body, bolt-on maple neck with satin urethane finish (gloss on headstock face) and Modern D profile, 10-14" compound radius rosewood fingerboard with white pearloid dots and 22 medium-jumbo frets. Bone nut
HARDWARE 2-Point Deluxe Synchronized Tremolo vibrato bridge with pop-in arm, short-post locking tuners
ELECTRONICS Ultra Double Tap humbucker (bridge), 2x Ultra Noiseless Hot Strat pickups (neck and middle), master volume (S-1 switch), neck/middle tone, bridge tone, 5-way blade pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 43.0mm at nut, 51.4mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.7mm at first fret, 21.8mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.1mm at nut, 51.6mm at bridge
WEIGHT 8.3lb/3.8kg
FINISH Cobra Blue gloss polyurethane (as reviewed), Aged Natural, Arctic Pearl, Plasma Red Burst, Texas Tea, Ultraburst. See Fender website for maple/rosewood fingerboard options, scratchplate colours and ash/alder body wood availability
LEFT-HANDERS No

8/10 **A great Strat for contemporary rock players – audition this before spending boutique money**

register bends, we couldn't make the Strat fret out at all. Even after all that bending and grimacing, the strings almost always returned to pitch. So far, so frictionless.

The American Ultra Strat's two-point vibrato and floating set-up won't be for everyone – we clearly can't get away with the faux-pedal-steel country shenanigans we enjoy so much with a Bigsby – but there's an awful lot of expression on tap here for everything from woozy Hawaiian-style glissandos to whinnying pinch harmonics.

Technical modern rock players are well catered for. Unlike the Elite HSS model, there's no tonestack-bypassing Passing Lane switch on the Ultra, but we don't really miss it – some Stratocasters with bridge 'buckers can be adenoidal or scratchy and feel like they need a shot in the arm, but there's plenty of girth here already for big riffs and powerchords.

For lighter textures, the master volume control's S-1 switch engages the Double Tap humbucker's single-coil voice. When the switch is depressed, clever wiring boosts the operative coil to retain more output than a traditional coil-split circuit. What does this mean in practice? There's a slight drop in punch when switching from full humbucking to single-coil mode, but it's certainly not thin or anaemic. Also, if you leave the S-1 switch engaged and flip to position two on the five-way, you'll find that familiar in-between tone beloved of funk players and Mark Knopfler fans.

Flipping to the neck and middle pickups, we're pleased to hear that 'Hot' doesn't translate to over-cooked, and neither has the guitar been robbed of its dynamics. There's still no better noodling platform than a Strat neck pickup into spring reverb and this is no exception, with all of your right-hand nuances coming through, whether you play with a pick, fingers, or both.

Fender's Noiseless pickups seem to have evolved to the point where they get out of the way, too. They eliminate a tonne of hum and as much noise as could be reasonably expected, without feeling strangled or synthetic. Much like the neck shape and body contours, the Noiseless pickups simply get the job done with a minimum of fuss, allowing you to get on with the business of making music – but you certainly notice the difference when you switch back to vintage-style pickups in the studio or in close proximity to a loud amplifier.

Both models feature Fenders own short-post locking tuners

In common with the Stratocaster, the Telecaster boasts some additional party tricks under its hood. Here, S-1 toggles between series and parallel twin-pickup voices to deliver the series tone often found on Telecasters with four-way wiring, although you don't have to grapple with a slightly disorientating four-position lever. In addition, the tone control is of the no-load variety (meaning it's bypassed when wide open – you can feel the click of a slight detent when it's rotated into this position) and, as on the Strat, there's a treble bleed circuit on the volume to retain clarity when you turn down.

With all this talk of treble content, you'd be forgiven for expecting eyeball-slicing Tele tone, but plugging in reveals a classy, hi-fidelity take on Leo's time-honoured design. There aren't too many gigs you could walk into with this guitar strapped on and fail to get the job done. Assuming you've learnt your parts, of course. But if it's country, indie, soul, power-pop, funk, punk or 60s R&B tones you need, the American Ultra Tele will take care of business in style.

Perhaps it's because there's no transition between finished and unfinished wood, but the Telecaster's satin 'board edges have an even smoother feel than the Strat's, and as a result the single-cut is the more addictive of the two guitars here. The enjoyable woody bite of the neck position is a real highlight, and the series mix introduces an altogether raunchier personality when you start to add overdrive. It's almost like your Nashville soirée suddenly transitioned from trading Luther Perkins licks in a honky-tonk on Broadway to an all-night jam at Easy Eye Sound with Dan Auerbach.

Extended playing time reveals thoughtful appointments on both guitars, such as the rubberised grips on the Strat's soft-touch knobs – vintage nerds will notice the shorter skirts recall the shape of the earliest Strat knobs from 1954 – the curved edges of the string retainers, and the Telecaster's Electrosocket jack mount that's such a huge improvement on the vintage design.

Although some of these features have been inherited from the previous Elite models, throughout the Ultra range, the aesthetics, sonics and playing experience all seem to have gone up a notch or two, which simply makes for sexier, sharper-looking and more desirable musical instruments. And before you sneer, let's not pretend that the process of buying a guitar is anything like buying an oven or a refrigerator – an instrument you can't stop looking at and never want to put down will likely be the wellspring for much more creativity than a stubborn, head-over-heart purchase based on specifications and price alone.

Other than some slightly rough edges in the bridge and control-plate cutouts of the Telecaster's pickguard, both Ultras appear to have been built with the kind of laser-precision you'd hope for – but don't always get – at this price point. The Ultras are £60 more expensive than their Elite equivalents, but they offer much more than a 3.3 per cent upgrade on the class of 2016. Being Fenders, they'll almost certainly hold their value better than some of the boutique competition, too. But don't buy an American Ultra with one eye on flipping it further down the line – buy one to *play* it, and see where it takes you… G

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FENDER'S SEARCH FOR

THE NEXT GREAT GUITAR

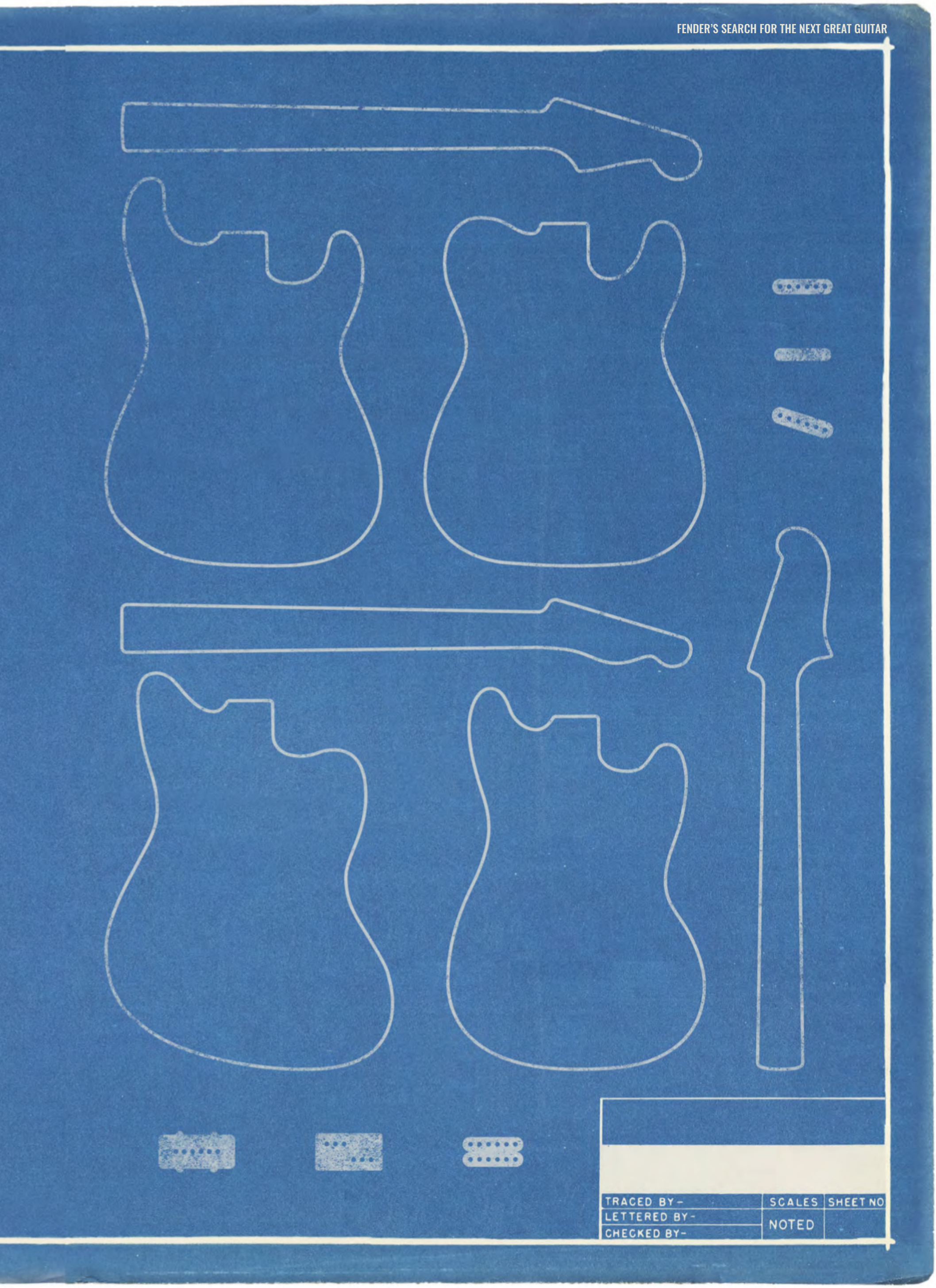
From late-60s leftovers such as the Swinger, through to more recent Parallel Universe and Alternate Reality projects, Fender has searched long and hard beyond the Telecaster and Stratocaster for a mash-up that will click with players. From ill-fated Frankenstein's monsters to bona fide cult classics, we chart the company's experiments with hybrid designs...

WORDS TONY BACON

Back in the day, Leo Fender thought a new guitar model would simply take the place of an earlier one. He figured the new improved Stratocaster, introduced in 1954, would replace the Telecaster, because he viewed the Tele and the Strat not as individual instruments but as a single piece of design work in continual progress, a sort of developmental whole.

Of course, we know it didn't happen like that. Leo quickly realised, no doubt with encouragement from his salespeople, that a varied line of different models makes good commercial sense. It's all about price-points and the tiered marketplace. But that didn't stop him and his colleagues constantly looking for improvement. Their new ideas simply informed new guitars, and the first notable ones appeared in 1958 and '62 as the Jazzmaster and the Jaguar. At the time, neither succeeded anything like as well as the primary pair.

Since then, Fender has basked in the glory of its original designs, modifying and tweaking and updating them through the decades. At the same time, though, it has been on something of a quest, searching for a design that might succeed as the next great Fender guitar. And often, that search has drawn on blends of the originals, mashing up shapes, controls, vibes, and pickups, transporting a mix of classic features into unfamiliar but hopefully appealing new settings.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ABOVE The Fender Swinger of 1969 utilised restyled, unused Musicmaster and Bass V bodies and Mustang necks

Kurt Cobain's early 90s Jag-Stang design was a hybrid of Jaguar and Mustang

WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

It all began in 1969. Fender had a relatively new owner, CBS, and was a mighty force in the electric guitar business, rivalled for the top spot only by its old adversary Gibson. CBS wrung every last drop of potential income from unused bodies and necks that otherwise would have been written off. Virgilio 'Babe' Simoni, Fender's product manager, suggested converting potentially wasted parts into new models. The results were two oddball mash-ups, the Swinger and the Custom.

The Swinger teamed unused Musicmaster or Bass V bodies with some unpopular short-scale Mustang-style necks. Simoni cut the headstock to a spear shape and chopped the bodies around, carving out a scoop in the base. The other 'bitsa' was the Custom (or Maverick), converted from unused Electric XII necks, bodies, and pickups. Simoni again re-cut the bodies, and he reorganised the long hockey-stick headstocks for six-string use.

Both the Swinger and the Custom were made for a very short period in necessarily limited numbers (though a new Swinger has just appeared from Fender Japan, an intriguing 50th birthday reissue). But the theory that it might be possible to rearrange existing material into something new and potentially successful lasted longer. In fact, as we shall see, it's still in play today.

Meanwhile, the Strat and Tele continued to dominate Fender's horizon, and the Jag and Jazzmaster gradually found appreciation with outsiders and noiseniks – the offset models eventually attaining classic status in their own right. All the features and components from these venerable originals have become fair game for Fender designers.

HERE WE ARE NOW

The first signs of a modern take on the Fender mash-up came, appropriately enough, in the postmodern soup of the grunge-drenched 1990s. Two of Kurt Cobain's favourite guitars were a '65 Jaguar, which had DiMarzio humbuckers and some switching modifications, and a '69 Competition Mustang, with an added tune-o-matic. Probably early in 1993, Cobain worked with Larry Brooks at Fender's Custom Shop on a custom instrument, cutting up pictures of Jags and Mustangs and pasting them together to come up with his 'new' design.

Kurt only received one of two prototypes and wasn't entirely happy with it, but following his

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THIS PAGE A 1996 Squier Vista Series Jagmaster affectionately named 'Marilyn'

untimely death in 1994, his family collaborated with Fender to release a production model. By now named the Jag-Stang, it hit the shops in '96. Fender said it was "a collision of contemporary features fused together to create a combination of Jaguar and Mustang" – as good a description of blended designs as there's ever been.

The following year, Fender's budget brand Squier offered a couple more examples, the Super-Sonic and the Jagmaster in the short-lived but popular Vista series. Joe Carducci at Squier was inspired to create the Super-Sonic when he saw a photo of Hendrix playing an upside-down Jaguar. He made adjustments to the size and shape and added a pair of humbuckers, with the bridge pickup tilted to improve tone.

The Jagmaster appeared after Fender's Mike Lewis spotted Bush man Gavin Rossdale playing a Jazzmaster with two humbuckers taped in position. The Squier team added a decent vibrato and a Jaguar-like shorter scale.

A couple of Fender signature models for the Hellecasters band also surfaced in '97, continuing the trend. John Jorgensen's Hellecaster matched a Strat body and big reverse headstock with three P-Bass-like

"MOST PEOPLE HAVE A STRAT, A TELE, BUT THE GUITARS WE'RE TALKING ABOUT HERE CAN BE SOMETHING ODD THAT NOT EVERYBODY HAS, AND QUIRKY – ESPECIALLY IF THEY HAVE SOME UNIQUE SOUNDS OR ELECTRONICS"

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split pickups, while Will Ray's Jazz-A-Caster came on as a Tele with reverse-wound Jazzmaster pickups and a small-head Strat neck – not forgetting the onboard Hipshot B-Bender.

Remaining with the prime Fender brand, in 1998 two further models, designed by Mike Lewis and George Blanda, underlined Fender's taste for convergence. The Toronado was not unlike the Squier Jagmaster, but with covered humbuckers and a Gibson-like control layout, and the Cyclone was a Mustang derivative with bridge humbucker plus single-coil and a Strat-like vibrato.

MOD PLATFORM

Squier had a surprise hit in 2004 after some further mixing and matching at Fender HQ. Justin Norvell had worked there since 1995, and in 2002 he took on a new role running Squier. He was alert to the grunge culture of Buy It Cheap and Bend It To Your Will, and began to wonder what it might be like if a '51-style P-Bass became a guitar.

He and his colleagues began morphing a '51 P-Bass and a Squier Strat, creating Photoshop mockups. They established a final look with a sort of contoured P-Bass-like body with associated control panel and pickguard, a bridge humbucker, a slanted Tele-like single-coil at the neck, and some cool control options.

When the Squier '51 went on sale in 2004 at $249, it was an instant hit. To some, it was obviously an inexpensive testbed. Guitarists had set about all kinds of guitars for years, of course, but the '51 seemed almost custom-made for creative modding.

The Pawn Shop series of 2011 marked Fender's first move to herd together a group of mash-up models for extra promo power. The tagline, Guitars That Never Were But Should Have Been, summed up the attitude perfectly, with the company boasting that the instruments "draw inspiration from the eccentric and innovative Fender creations of the mid-60s to mid-70s era" with a "fascinating mix of diverse Fender components".

Justin Norvell, who by now was vice president of product development at Fender, again headed the charge from the past into the present. "The idea with the Pawn Shop guitars was a sliding doors kind of thing," he says. "In our initial discussions of how to release them, we considered saying it was some kind of scavenger hunt, you know? With doctored photos and maybe a conspiracy theory of a lost prototype, as if we were showing things we'd found hidden away somewhere."

As well as a Fender version of the Squier '51 in the first batch of Pawn Shops in 2011, there was the '72, a Thinline f-holed Strat with a Tele neck, two different humbuckers, and a '51-style pickguard and control plate. Also making its debut was the Mustang Special, with a modified offset body, short-scale neck, two Tele Deluxe-style humbuckers with 70s-style covers, and a couple of Jazzmaster-like switches.

A model launched in 2011 in Fender's Modern Player series – which mostly consisted of conventional looking hot-rodded models – could well have slotted into the Pawn Shop series. It harked back to a model name for a Fender that never was.

ABOVE Patrick Sweany on his Pawn Shop Offset Special at Nashville's Americana Festival September 2015

OPPOSITE PAGE The Squier '51 and the Mustang Special

BELOW The Fender Tornado of the 1990s opted for a Gibson-like control layout

The Pawn Shop series Offset Special of 2012 mixed Strat, Thinline and Jazzmaster stylings

The original Marauder model had appeared in Fender's 1965-66 catalogue but never actually went to production. "It appears as though there are no pickups," read the blurb. "There are, in reality, however, four newly created pickups mounted underneath the pickguard."

Prototypes were made, including a version with regular pickups, but the model was shelved. Fender revived the Marauder name for the 2011 model by creating a Jag meets Jazzmaster vibe and adding a triple-coil bridge pickup for luck.

Two more Pawn Shop mashups followed in 2012. The Offset Special had a Thinline-style f-hole body, this time seemingly a tweaked Strat without a pickguard, plus Jazzmaster-vibe humbuckers and simpler controls. The Jaguarillo, meanwhile, was a sort of three-pickup Jaguar, again with simplified controls. Two final Pawn Shop models were launched in 2013.

The Super-Sonic revived the earlier Squier guitar, now with both humbuckers slanted, while the 70s Strat Deluxe derived from a Custom Shop design by Yuriy Shishkov, merged a Strat and a Thinline Tele, with Thinline-style pickguard and pickup (regular Tele neck plus 70s-style bridge humbucker) and reversed Thinline-like controls.

PARALLEL LINES

Fender rounded up a couple more series of mash-up models in the last few years, taking trips into a Parallel Universe and an Alternate Reality. "The modularity of a Fender is one of its beauties and hallmarks," Norvell says. "You can do so much. So there's constantly people experimenting and playing around in R&D and in the model shop and in our Nashville facility.

"It's not: okay, we want a series in six months, let's get cracking and put some things together! A lot of times, there's raw pieces of ideas, and rough sketches, and first prototypes, designs we look at and refine. And then we put a net around some of these existing things to make a series."

Fender continues to devise many ideas and designs that never see production. Norvell estimates that when you see, say, six guitars in a new series, there were probably 20 or so to choose from. And surely it's easier with CAD facilities today to mock up any number of possibilities?

"There are many ways to do this. We have people graphically rendering guitars, but also we have people who still get out the bandsaw and just take a whack at something," he adds with a laugh. "And then we

reverse-engineer that. The creativity that leads to new models takes every form possible."

In 2018, the Parallel Universe series saw Fender once more meshing and melding features. Two models offered opposite exchanges. If you wanted to know what a Strat's pickups and pickguard and vibrato and jack look like in a Tele body, there was the Strat-Tele Hybrid. If you wanted to know what a Tele's pickups and pickguard and bridge and controls plate and side jack look like in a Strat body, there was the Whiteguard Strat.

Also appearing in this Universe were the Jazz-Tele (Jazzmaster pickups, Tele body), the Troublemaker Tele (bound mahogany Tele body, two humbuckers, Strat head), and the Tele Thinline Super Deluxe (TV Jones Gretsch-style pickups). And if you wanted a refreshingly new design, there was the Meteora, designed by Fender's Josh Hurst as a sort of extreme space-age Jazzmaster.

Norvell reports that such extremities can polarise attitudes within Fender when decisions have to be made about which designs to release. "I think the Jaguar Strat was probably the most contested," he says of another this-plus-that model in the Parallel Universe series.

"There were people who thought that it was more like a Jag-Stang, which was two things glued together, that it should have been a little more designed and entwined, rather than two things simply foisted upon each other.

"I think guitar players love things that are off the beaten path," he adds. "There are all kinds of oddities, and sometimes we look to the B-sides of our oeuvre. Most people have a Strat, a Tele, but the guitars we're talking about here can be something odd that not everybody has, and quirky – especially if they have some unique sounds or electronics, something that gives them a reason to be."

The Fender Parallel Universe Troublemaker Tele of 2018 – a cool blend of spec and eras

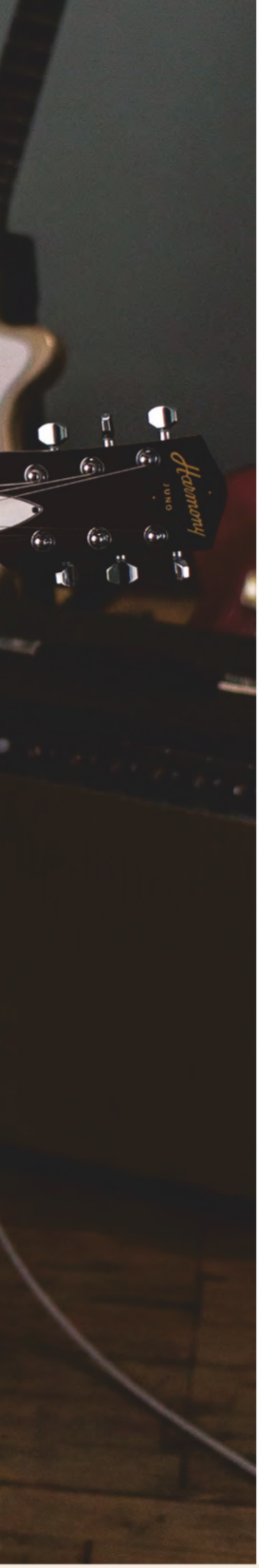
REALITY BITES

The most recent visit to the world of Fender amalgamation took shape as the Alternate Reality series of 2019. The Powercaster came about when Alex Perez at Fender messed with the idea of a more aggressive Jazzmaster/Jag vibe, and the Sixty-Six was a Strat derived from two scaled-down Jazz Bass bodies, along with HSS pickups and a big-headstock Strat neck.

Norvell says that a new mash-up series, unnamed at press time, will be launched at NAMM in January 2020. Perhaps, one day, Fender will stumble on a combination of features that fall together and grab us in a way that the Tele and the Strat have done for decades.

Is that possible? It's probably an unanswerable question. "Well," Norvell concludes with a smile, "it's *semi*-unanswerable – but it's unanswerable for the near-term. Because I think the Stratocaster and the Telecaster really benefit from the body of work and music that's been recorded on them, and so I think that it takes time. If something is to eventually supplant the Strat or Tele, that is something that would take time. It would take generations, and it would be the sound of an era."

J U
N O



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THE FUTURE OF GUITAR

WORDS JOSH GARDNER

The first 20 years of the 21st century have seen huge evolutionary leaps in almost every facet of the guitar. Over the last two decades, companies large and small have been innovating, refining and enhancing their wares to bring us to a point where you could easily argue that there's never been a better time to be a guitar player. But what happens next? As we enter a brand new decade, we asked a panel of industry movers and shakers to look back at what's changed, gaze into their crystal balls and tell us what they think the future holds for this most uniquely varied and exciting instrument…

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PAUL REED SMITH, PRS GUITARS

Paul Reed Smith is a uniquely successful and influential figure in the world of guitar. A man who founded his own company back in 1985 to realise his radical vision for the future of electric guitar, and in the 35 years since has earned a place at the very top table of our industry. And he’s done it all without ever losing his passion for getting his hands dirty, still as obsessed with refining and improving his instruments all the time.

As we move into the next decade, we spoke to the man himself about the journey PRS has been on over that time, and as the company gets ready to celebrate its 35th anniversary in 2020, what the future might hold for the Maryland firm…

Of all the technology changes in guitar building over the last decade, what do you think has had the most significant impact?
“To put it succinctly, precision. Most notably, in CNC (computer numerical control) and metal moulding. When I started out building guitars, it was a slow and laborious process to make a high-tolerance body and neck. Large scale, accurate production – at least at the level of accuracy we aimed for – was not possible with the woodworking CNC machines of the day.

“FOR PRS, CHANGE IS TO MAKE THINGS BETTER, NOT JUST TO MAKE THINGS DIFFERENT”

“The modern CNC machine has not only allowed us to make guitars more accurately than we could by hand, but it also allows us to make them faster, which means they are more affordable than they would be otherwise. From a parts point of view, metal moulding techniques have also advanced which is a major contributor to the guitars we can design here in Maryland, and the guitars that we can have manufactured under license abroad. Technology allows us to make things the best they can be, so a luthier starts with the best parts.”

What do you suspect will be the next significant innovation might be in the guitar world?

“I probably look at this a bit differently. Innovation can happen in steps – in my experience, it is usually a summation of steps that play a larger role in pushing the instrument as a whole forward. The whole becomes more than the sum of the parts.

“So, to me, something that has been turning in the industry and I think is about to tip over, is the very real possibility that brand-new guitars will be able to outmanoeuvre classic vintage instruments. ‘Vintage’ guitars can be like unicorns to some players, but if you think about it, those same guitars were brand new in the moments that made them so beloved, so it’s not that sacrilegious of a thought!”

Are there any ‘red lines’ in guitar manufacture that you think will always need to be done by hand or by a human being?

“There are scores of things that are better done by high-tech, computer-driven equipment and there are scores of things that will never be done by high-tech computer equipment. To give you an example of each, cutting out the body shape is perfect for computer-driven equipment. It’s going to cut the same shape every time.

“On the other hand, staining a Private Stock ain’t gonna be driven by a computer. The final check of an instrument ain’t gonna be done by a computer. There are just some things that are too nuanced to not have a luthier or an artist making the decisions, and there are scores of iterations in the middle.”

How has your growing relationship with artists changed the way you approach guitar building and marketing?

“This answer is too complicated to boil down in a few sentences, but I would say Carlos [Santana] helped immensely with the tremolo and industry acceptance of the birds and carved top. David Grissom made the McCarty and the DGT happen – both vintage-leaning instruments that were a start for us playing more directly in that world. Mark Tremonti assisted greatly with the PRS Singlecut and more recently with amp tone sculpting. John Mayer made the Super Eagle and Silver Sky happen and working with him led to what we’re calling TCI now, which is a way to voice and EQ a pickup. And, Ricky Skaggs, Tony McManus, and Martin Simpson were up to their eyeballs in the PRS acoustic design with us.

“All of those collaborations, and a bunch of friendships and partnerships I haven’t mentioned, are a part of our process of listening, learning, implementing positive change, and pushing the guitar forward. To give a final example, the Mayer, Tremonti, and Grissom amps would not have happened without their driving force. And the Silver Sky single-coil pickups taught us how to make better humbuckers.

“In the end, it’s not so much that they have changed the way we develop instruments, we always put a lot of stock in the player’s perspective, but they have all certainly helped us push the goal further and in new directions.”

Looking forward into the next decade, as someone who has spent over 30 years refining the electric guitar, do you think there’s much headroom left in terms of how good an electric guitar can be?

“Every time I think we know enough, something else happens that empties our cup, and I feel like I don’t know anything. This week, for example, Jimmy Herring and I have been going back and forth about pickups and guitars, and I saw him play, actively using brand new stuff, and we were both laughing – in a good way – about the results.

“So, have we reached a zenith? No. Are we really happy with where we are with finish and pickups and guitar making? Absolutely. For us, change is to make things better not just to make things different. My sincere hope is that there are more things that will change in the future, because that means we’re still progressing in our craft.” G

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“THE INSTRUMENTS WE CREATE WILL INFLUENCE THE SOUNDS AND MUSIC THAT CREATIVE PLAYERS MAKE, AND THE FRESH PATHS THAT MUSICIANS TAKE COMPEL MAKERS TO RESPOND TO THEIR NEEDS”

ANDY POWERS, TAYLOR GUITARS

Since Andy Powers joined Taylor Guitars in 2011, the laid-back Californian has become the creative fulcrum of one of the world’s biggest guitar companies. Over those years, Powers has overseen a gradual evolution of the Taylor recipe, as the company has earned anew its reputation as one of the most innovative and forward-thinking brands around.

As the dawn rises on the 2020s, we asked the man who became a partner at Taylor in 2019 what he thinks the future will hold for the company and the wider industry...

How important is it for a company like Taylor to keep pushing the instrument forward in terms of design?

“The reality is we love instruments and musicians, and are passionate about furthering our craft. I feel making guitars is a lot like playing music in that you can’t maintain a steady state for very long without growing stale. As a builder or musician, you need to continue developing and refining, having fresh thoughts and executing with ever-improving ability, or else you’ll slowly sink into a state of atrophy. For Taylor Guitars, our love of the instrument compels us to keep practising so that we continually have more to offer.

“While Taylor can be described as a guitar manufacturer, I’ve always thought of guitar making as a practice in the way that a doctor might practise medicine. The implication is you continue to develop and learn, and incorporate ever-deepening understanding into what you make in order to offer more to a musician than you were able to before.”

Taylor has promoted conservation and the use of sustainable woods in guitar building, how do you imagine this will evolve?

“We’re both deeply in love with wood, and committed to it. We’re committed to using it, planting it, conserving it, and not wasting it carelessly. In my view, of all the things that can be made from wood, a musical instrument is possibly the highest value. We’ll continue to do everything we can to ensure healthy forests and wood farms, and healthy, efficient use of those materials. In the last several years, we’ve seen a shift away from the ultra-exotic, super-rare species that, in many cases, should be left alone, toward musicians having an appetite for guitars made from woods that sound, look and feel great and

are also managed in ways that ensure a healthy long-term outlook.

"Often, when folks ask about the future of wood use, there is a common assumption that the future of guitars will incorporate more composites or plastics to conserve timber resources. The reality is most synthetic materials have a far more damaging environmental impact than timbers. Sure, there are wood species that need careful control so as to not overburden the forests they come from, but there are many opportunities to build great instruments from woods that are carefully and deliberately sourced, and that represent a healthier future."

Is it an exciting challenge, for someone like yourself, to work out how to use new timbers in a way that sounds and plays well?

"It's genuinely thrilling to work with both the familiar and the new. At times, we feel like chefs wandering through a farmer's market and seeing a new ingredient laid on the table next to the familiar ones. These new flavours always bring fresh excitement into the shop – how does it work? What does it smell like? What does it do best? What should it turn into? Where does it best fit in the recipe, or on the menu?

"Some woods we come across can be challenging to learn how best to use them, or whether to use them at all, but this is certainly part of the guitar-making process, which keeps us growing. It's especially rewarding when you start working with a previously unconsidered wood that turns out to be surprisingly wonderful for making guitars. It's like discovering a new food group you didn't know existed."

Do you see innovations that you've brought in to the higher-end Taylor guitars in recent years trickling down to the more affordable models in the near future?

"We like to make a full range of guitars – from the modest ones to the luxurious ones. Often, the guitars with a premium price have a high cost because they require more work to build in the first place. In both material cost and construction, more goes into those designs. Those are obviously difficult to bring into a more modest price level unless we can develop new working methods that bring higher efficiency.

"While some designs simply can't translate to less costly instruments without further technological breakthroughs, we are always looking to make every guitar better, no matter what the price of the

"MUSICAL INFLUENCES ARE LIKE TIDES – ALWAYS COMING AND GOING"

instrument. We want musicians to enjoy the best guitar we can offer them, and hopefully, we can meet them at whatever price works for them."

You've innovated a lot with body shapes since you joined Taylor, is that something you want to continue to explore?

"There will be both development of new shapes and more refining of current outlines. As far as an acoustic guitar goes, the perimeter shape is a significant part of an instrument. The outline will directly influence the sound, as well as indirectly influence the way a musician holds and plays the guitar. We'll continue to refine and develop our existing portfolio of instruments and add to them as we develop new voices to offer to the musical landscape.

"In some cases, it might come in the form of redesigning an existing model around our V-Class internal architecture; in other cases, we'll create entirely new designs. In simple words, we're interested in making instruments that have a reason to be made. Each needs to bring something of musical value to the musicians. In pursuit of this, we are completely open to altering current designs in subtle or significant ways, or creating entirely new designs."

Taylor has been keen to embrace new digital technology in the past, is that something that you see continuing in the future?

"Opportunities to incorporate digital technologies into acoustic instruments certainly exist, and we've closely investigated some of them. That said, I notice that musicians often gravitate toward an acoustic instrument as a counterpoint to the technologies that seem to govern so much of our daily existence. There is a beautiful directness – a sense of realism – in the experience of playing an acoustic instrument that feels to me like a ballast to balance out the detachment I sense with digital technologies. The two seem to maintain an experiential contrast in so many ways, and I'm not sure they should be incorporated.

"Consider the lifespan of an acoustic guitar in contrast to the lifespan of an average digital device. An acoustic guitar made of woods that took decades, even centuries, to grow has a lifespan every bit as musically viable in a hundred years as it does today. The useful lifespan of most digital devices ranges from months to a few short years. It seems like adapting a guitar to accommodate the latest digital technology is needlessly imposing an artificially short lifespan on an instrument. Once the technology moves on, or the electronic components fail, what is to become of the guitar that could have gone on making music?"

The acoustic world is perhaps a broader church than ever, with the internet enabling smaller brands to punch above their weight – will that change things for the big guns such as Taylor?

"A small guitar shop has the benefit of being able to make discoveries and quickly incorporate new ideas into their next guitar. Conventionally, a larger manufacturer has a far more difficult time responding. As for Taylor, we work best when we operate on both levels. We're fortunate to develop instruments in a very small and dynamic shop environment, then quickly gain enough momentum to create all the necessary aspects to introduce those fresh thoughts into a larger production environment.

"We're dedicated to a path of improving our guitars because we like to, and we love to be in the company of fellow craftspeople who share a similar approach to their work. This environment of many makers striving to create ever-better work is great both for our industry, and ultimately, for musicians."

The last decade was a period of rejuvenation for the acoustic guitar in popular music – how do builders respond to that, and foster that connection with new players to ensure that it continues into the next one?

"It seems to me that guitars will always have a place in the musical landscape for a wide variety of reasons: accessibility, portability, functionality and directness of playing experience, to name only a few. On the other hand, musical influences are like tides – always coming and going, carrying in new treasures, and drifting off with familiar ones.

"We understand the relationship between musicians and their instruments is a two-way street. The instruments we create will influence the sounds and music that creative players make, and the fresh paths that musicians take compel makers to respond to their needs. Guitar makers need to offer inspiring instruments to musicians so they can create the art."

What trends and innovations do you think are going to shape the guitar world over the next decade?

"The path forward rarely appears very clear, so I have a tough time detailing any one aspect. One larger trend I've seen, and expect to continue, is that it seems we are currently experiencing a dynamic era of development in the guitar world for a variety of reasons – from details in guitar construction, new architectures, all the way to the forests and the woods we are using.

"All of these exciting developments are resulting in ever more expressive instruments that musicians are using to create an ever-wider landscape of music. This trend doesn't appear to show any signs of slowing down, or any signal of direction change. How could it? Since the music that today's players are making is heading in every direction. I expect to see more development in the years to come. This is a fantastic era to be a builder and a musician, and we're thrilled to be a part of it." G

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“THERE’S STILL A WAY TO GO BEFORE THE FEELING OF A VALVE AMP CAN BE FAITHFULLY REPLICATED DIGITALLY”

LUKE GREEN, MARSHALL

The 2010s was a whirlwind decade for Marshall, with the iconic amp brand rediscovering its heritage, taking its first steps into modelling and expanding significantly as a lifestyle brand. With the recent Origin and Studio Series hitting all the right notes for Marshall devotees, we asked Product Director Luke Green (pictured) to give his thoughts on the future of those famous black and gold boxes as we move into a new decade…

When looking at the trends over the last 10 years, how do you think that amps are likely to evolve in the 2020s?

“The last 10 years have seen some seismic shifts in the demands of players. Most notably the need for smaller, lower-powered amps. This is due to the change in venue sizes and volume restrictions placed on venues. This has resulted in wattage demands shrinking for a lot of players with 50-watt and 20-watt amps becoming more popular.

“Even lower-wattage products have been growing in demand. The quality of digital sound has also increased dramatically and become much more popular and so the likelihood is that low-power portable amps and products with more digital technology will become even more popular in the future.”

High-end digital amps have become widely accepted in recent years, do you think the onus will be on the big amp brands to move into this sphere to compete?

“Marshall partners with Softube for our digital sounds, so there are already Marshall plugin products that are aimed at the high-end market. Plugins for studio and home use are now commonplace, so we are really pleased to be able to say that the official ones for Marshall amps and cabs are available for players.

Guitarists using digital amps for live performance is definitely now ‘a thing’ and the technology and tones produced in this manner has become widely accepted. I think you will see all amp companies moving into this arena over time, but only when the technology represents the tone they are trying to produce.”

Digital is better than ever at emulating tube tone – do you think we’ll ever get all the way there?

“It’s difficult to say because what makes valve products special is the feel they give a player: it’s more than just tone. Achieving great tone is already possible from digital, but to get the *feeling* is not quite there – for example, distortion is only just replicating the valve distortion we are used to. There’s still a way to go before the feeling of a valve amp can be faithfully replicated digitally.”

Do you think that valve amps will remain as popular with guitar players as digital becomes more advanced?

“The challenge will be integrating newer technologies and delivering valve amps with a lower power output that tailor the sound and feel players are looking for in a format that can be used today. The uniquely flawed way that valves behave mean that the organic nature of a valve amp is something familiar and pleasant musically. Technological advances will become more popular but, like the guitar itself, sometimes the traditional ways of achieving good tone just work.”

How do you think the way that guitarists use their gear will evolve in the context of modern popular music?

“Guitar players are always experimenting with different ways of integrating their sound into music, and while a lot of modern music styles emerging

today are not guitar-driven the familiar sound of the guitar always seems to find its place in the repertoire. I think through experimentation and mixing both classic equipment and more modern technologies together guitarists will continue to push the boundaries of what can be achieved.

"As a company that designs equipment for guitar players, it is our responsibility to provide both of those product types for players to enable them to create their own outcomes. Whether it's guitars, effects or amps, companies need to offer a broad range of ingredients for players to choose from. Sometimes these new ideas come from the players themselves and sometimes they are driven by advances in technology... but ultimately it's the guitar player themselves who will dictate what equipment will be used when the rehearse or perform."

Changing topic, Marshall has been very successful in expanding as a lifestyle brand in the last decade – how do you plan to keep ahead of the curve in that field?

"Lifestyle products are just one part of what makes the Marshall brand. Ultimately we are a music brand and everything we do is designed to provide people who love music with something they can enjoy, from our amps for players, headphones and speakers for people who want to listen to great music, through to our record label for those players looking to get their music to the masses. We want to make sure everyone who enjoys music in some way can get something they want from the brand.

"WHAT MAKES VALVE PRODUCTS SPECIAL IS THE FEEL THEY GIVE A PLAYER. IT'S MORE THAN JUST TONE"

"Other brands have already begun to branch out in similar ways to Marshall, but that just re-enforces the point that, as a company, we are a trendsetter – we realised that there were people who loved the brand but couldn't play, so we delivered something for them. That's part of our DNA and goes back to the founding principle of the company – listen to what people want."

What trend or innovation in the guitar world has you most excited for the next decade?

"That's always the trickiest question to answer. Obviously, across our offering, we are always looking to improve and innovate. We have a full-time team of really talented engineers and designers who constantly design and develop products at our UK offices and we are not afraid to experiment and test new ideas. Sometimes though delivering them in a way that will stand up to the rigours of everyday use can be a challenge.

"Overall we are looking at ways to integrate functionality and technology into new products, but only where there is a benefit for the end-user. So without being too specific, I suppose the best answer I can offer is that we are looking at combining the best elements of what is available to players today with products which can perform and last."

“PEDALS CAN KEEP GETTING SMALLER, BUT BOOTS WILL ALWAYS BE HUGE”

COLT WESTBROOK, WALRUS AUDIO

In the last few years, Walrus Audio has established itself as one of the most creative and prolific brands in the boutique effects world, with a raft of hugely inventive, unconventional and great-sounding boxes coming out of the company’s Oklahoma HQ.

The creative fulcrum of Walrus’s innovation is Colt Westbrook (above). The pastor’s kid turned effects wizard shares his thoughts on the future of the most vibrant and varied aspect of the guitar world…

The last decade has seen an explosion in boutique effects makers, what do you think has driven that boom?

“I get asked this a lot and my answer changes a lot, too! Today, I think that there are two journeys happening for players. A path to achieve timeless, grand tone, and a journey to find innovative tone. No matter where you fall, pedals are the easiest way to sculpt the sound of your playing.”

In an increasingly crowded market, it’s harder than ever to stand out – how do you think Walrus has done that, and how do you plan to continue that going forward?

“We keep our heads down and design pedals that our picky and pretentious friends would want to play. Then we set up a campaign that we believe our closest buds would think was cool. That’s it. We’re going to keep doing just that while keeping the door open to the guitar world to come into the circle.”

It seems like brands are managing to squeeze in more and more into a simple pedal than ever before, do you think this is going to continue, or are there limits to what is usable in a simple one- or two-switch box?

“I think the smallest boxes you’ll see have come out. Pedals can keep getting smaller, but boots will always be huge.”

How do you imagine the effects world is going to evolve over the next few years? Are there any trends, challenges or opportunities that you can see coming that you imagine will be impactful on the wider world?

“You’re going to see people obsessing – in a good way – with pushing the envelope and others hell-bent on preserving the past. Between the two is where great sounds are made and as long as that’s happening, the inspiration to design new gear will continue.”

What’s the one dream innovation that you’d like to see over the next decade? And why do you think it’d be such a good thing?

“I’d love to see the on-ramp to learning instruments not as difficult. Not everyone wants to do what the guitarists of our generation did: buy a guitar, find a teacher, have our mom drive us there once a week, and so on. There’s so much truth in the fact that good things take years to build. At the same, Gen Z requires immediacy in everything they choose to consume or partake in. You can look at that, scoff and keep walking. Or you can look at it and say, ‘How can I help?’”

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"THE GUITAR IS WIDE OPEN AS A CREATIVE TOOL. THERE'S REALLY NO KNOWING WHERE IT'S GOING"

JUSTIN NORVELL, FENDER

As Fender's Executive Vice President of Product, Justin Norvell has been a key figure in the evolution of the company's broad and varied product line in recent years. In his time at Fender, he's overseen the introduction of everything from the Squier '51 to Fender's new all-digital Tone Master amps, via the Pawn Shop series and the Meteora.

Before we close the door on a decade when Fender's guitars became more popular and more visible than they have in a long time, Justin took some time out to share his thoughts on the future of guitar, and its place in pop music…

The explosion of high-end digital amps and effects has been one of the most significant developments in guitar over the last 10 years – why do you think things have changed so quickly in a relatively short period?

"It's like any new technology – there's a fulcrum point of it 'making sense', like electric cars and solar energy. As an analogy for reference, the tipping point for electric cars will be when the math makes sense, when performance, serviceability and the savings of no petrol – compared to the price of the car – work out. When those elements align and reach that level, the electric car could become mass accepted.

"Modelling, sound-wise, has been getting better and better, and coupled with improvements in IRs – impulse responses – more processing power, and artist adoption, it's gotten to a point where it's reached a level of mass acceptance. Digital or modelling amps used to be scoffed at by some and considered as 'less than', but that seems to largely have evaporated. Regarding modelling vs analogue/tube amps, I think it's more 'in addition to' rather than 'instead of'. Players want to pick the right tool for the job.

"For example, many bands record with tube gear – there is just some voodoo to the tone. But they will tour with modelling gear, as there's somewhat of a convenience factor to the smaller, lighter rig. It's kind of like owning and loving a vintage '57 Strat, but bringing a Relic '57 model with you out on the road. As a company known for tone and tube amps, some thought it was a bold move for Fender to offer the Tone Master amps, but there are so many ways to get your signal and we just want to offer musicians great options in all areas."

Many of Fender's products over the last decade have recreated vintage instruments at various price points. Do you think there's still an appetite for new and unconventional guitar designs?

"Again, we are all about offering a suite of tools for music makers. We are not constrained by dogma. There is a reverence for the old designs, and there's no doubt Leo got it right all the way back then, but we also hold to his original concepts of always moving forward. He didn't stop with the Esquire or the '51 version of the Precision Bass; it always changed and evolved.

"And since our designs are modular, there's no shortage of interesting mods and reinterpretations of vintage gear. In general, the 50s and 60s stuff is the classic part of the canon – what some of the greatest songs were written and recorded on. They're the 'OG' versions of our platforms, and that really resonates with a lot of players."

The way guitars are being used in pop music has obviously changed dramatically in recent years, how will guitar brands adapt to this evolution?

"From the late 60s to the early 90s, electric guitars were based in riffs and virtuosic solos. Over the last 15 years, the guitar – in lockstep with the rise of the pedal industry – has become more and more of a textural instrument in many genres. That's the great thing about electric guitar and bass; you can be ripping in a metal band, or creating

abstract soundscapes and using the guitar as a 'sonic paintbrush', more like a synth. It's wide open as a creative tool. There's really no knowing where it's going, but the guitar is chameleonic and will fit with whatever is next."

What do you think will be the biggest trends in gear over the next few years?

"The great thing about the guitar as an instrument is that it can find a space in any type of music, so I feel the future for guitar is solid. The continued expansion of digital and connected products on the amp and effects side will continue to advance and evolve as well. As far as modelling goes, it will be less about 'new' stuff, and more about continuous improvement of the tones and sounds, as well as ease of use for the player."

"WE ARE NOT CONSTRAINED BY DOGMA. LEO FENDER DIDN'T STOP WITH THE ESQUIRE OR THE '51 VERSION OF THE PRECISION BASS; IT ALWAYS CHANGED AND EVOLVED"

THE *Guitar* INTERVIEW

KEITH URBAN

The gravitational pull of Nashville has always been an irresistible one for aspiring country artists, and it was no different for Keith Urban when he left Australia for Music City the best part of three decades ago. Since then, he's racked up 11 platinum-selling albums, four Grammy Awards, seven CMA Awards, and recognition as one of the true superstars of modern country. Keith Urban is also one of us – a man truly obsessed with guitars, who you feel could happily sit around talking about gear for as long as someone would let him. And who are we to stop him?

WORDS JOSH GARDNER **PHOTOGRAPHY** ANDREW WHITTON

James Brown might have once held the title of the hardest working man in showbusiness, but for one Saturday evening in mid-October, Keith Urban was giving him a run for his money. In London to promote his 2020 UK tour – his first in over a decade – most of us would have considered an appointment to perform on the BBC's flagship primetime TV show, *Strictly Come Dancing*, to be more than enough for one night, but Urban had other plans. The guitarist had friends playing in town that night – South Carolina rockers Hootie & The Blowfish at the Apollo, and country superstar Brad Paisley at the O2 – and they both asked him if he wanted to join them on stage…

"Normally we're all playing on the same night. So it's rare that I get to see somebody play live, let alone get up and jump in as well," Urban explains as we sit down with him in his penthouse suite overlooking an autumnal Hyde Park a few days later. "It was insane that two of my friends would be playing on the exact same night, at the exact same time. And both would text me to say, 'Hey, can you come and sit in?' I was like, 'How do I make this work!?'

"I asked somebody what the drive time was from the Apollo over to the O2 and they're like, 'On a rainy Saturday night? Maybe 1:40 if you're lucky!' And then someone said, 'What about the tube? It's like 30 minutes!' So that's how we did it!"

The notion of one of country's biggest stars riding the Underground across town for a gig on a Saturday evening like he's heading to an open-mic night might seem a little incongruous, and yet it fits. As we chat about his life and career, it becomes apparent that despite the fame, the Oscar-winner wife and the laundry list of awards, Urban remains very much the working-class boy from Brisbane who has loved guitars and music for as long as he can remember.

THIS PAGE A selection of Urban's regular gig favourites, photographed at his Nashville base; Marshall and Bogner heads for live; his battered '64 Fender Strat

"My mum and dad gave me a ukulele when I was four. And my dad said I could strum it in time with songs on the radio," Urban recalls of his earliest musical experiences. "Obviously, I couldn't play the chords or anything, I was just hacking away! But I think he recognised that I had rhythm."

Australia's east coast isn't particularly known as a hotbed of country music, but Urban grew up with the sounds of Nashville all around thanks to the influence of his father, Bob.

"My dad always loved American culture," Keith explains. "He was a drummer, and he was a teenager in the 50s, right around rock 'n' roll. So he got the bug – he was obsessed with Elvis, and Jerry Lee, and Chuck Berry… all this rock 'n' roll stuff. And he loved the cars! Then from the 50s through to the 60s, rock became a bit more folkish, and my dad went a bit that way, and then from there, he just sort of eased over into American country music."

CASH DELIVERY

Bob wasted no time getting Keith and his older brother Shane immersed into the world of country – taking the pair to see none other than Johnny Cash when Keith was barely in primary school.

"That's a memorable concert when you're five!" he chuckles. "I remember my dad buying us these little Western shirts and little bolo ties – we had the whole look going on! There's a place called Festival Hall in Brisbane – it's a 5,000-seat hall that they built for boxing matches, so it's sort of a big square. And man, when you're five years old, 5,000 people is like 500,000 people! And I just remember how boisterous loud and rowdy it was… and everyone was smashed I'm sure! Working-class city, working-class act… yeah!"

The man in black's arrival, however, would have a transformative effect on both the crowd and a young Keith…

"I remember this guy walking out on stage with this singular spotlight, everyone going crazy… and then the whole place turning into a library – just dead quiet," he recalls. "I still get chills when I think about that. I was like, 'What is going on up there? What just happened? How did that guy do that?'

"It's funny, I often wonder if it was a case of me thinking, 'I'd like to do that' or was it, 'That speaks to me because I'm *going* to do that'. I love that I don't know which one it is."

At the age of six, Keith got given a three-quarter-size Suzuki nylon-string and a guitar teacher, and

in no time, he was immersing himself in guitars and guitar music.

"I just wanted to play songs off the radio," he reflects. "I look back, and it really was more that I just wanted to learn some chords so I could sing a song. I wasn't thinking about lead guitar or anything like that yet. That all came a bit later."

WORKING CLASS HEROES

When we ask Urban to look back on his earliest guitar influences, his dad is once again a huge factor. Bob loved going to watch local bands play in the pubs and bars of Brisbane, and would often take his sons with him – it wasn't long before Keith had found his first guitar idols…

"These local guys never get props, but I'd bet that most famous guitar players were influenced by some local guy before some named person," Urban explains. "For me, there was a guy called Dallas Alvin, another guy called Barry Clough, and another guy called Reg Grant. They were all playing in these local cover bands, and when I saw them I was like, 'Oh man, I wish I could play as good as that guy!'

"Of course, they're all better than you when you're eight years old! And they all had great electric guitars – they were probably crap guitars, but they're a lot better than my Suzuki nylon-string acoustic!"

Urban wouldn't have to wait too long to ditch the Suzuki, however, and at the age of nine, he got his first electric guitar – one that would go a long way in shaping the guitar player he would go on to become.

"My dad took me to this place called the Australian Academy Of Music, which sounds very fancy, but it's actually a pretty basic guitar store in Brisbane," Urban chuckles. "He said, 'We're going to buy you an electric guitar… I mean, you're going to pay me back, but I'll buy it!' I think it was about $130 – it took me a while to pay it back!

"So I played a bunch of these different guitars, and it came down to a black Les Paul copy with gold pickups – I think it was a Kasuga or something like that – or this Ibanez Tele Deluxe copy that was a natural walnut colour with a mother of pearl pickguard. And I played them both, and I really liked the Les Paul-looking black one – I think I just liked the black more than the wood grain! And my dad said, 'Well, let's ask the guy that runs the store…' and for whatever reason, that guy said, 'I think he should play the Ibanez, it'll be better for him.' And it's funny because I later realised that in that moment, that set me on a Fender path!"

Later on, when he was a teenager, one of those local guitar heroes would continue to shape Keith's love of guitars and guitar playing in significant ways.

"This guy again, Reg Grant, he had a Roland JC-120, and Fender Stratocaster in that Antigua colour – that guitar looked *gorgeous*," he enthuses. "Through that amp, it sounded quite magical – that was the first combination of things that made me go, 'Oh okay, this is proper gear!' I think it's because I was 15, which is a great age to start thinking about all that stuff!

ABOVE His Gibson ES-345, used for studio work only

"Reg also turned me on to Dire Straits, and man, I just loved Mark Knopfler's playing. I got a Strat because of Knopfler… as you do. It was Candy Apple Red. They made one that was just called The Strat, just as they came out of CBS. It weighed a *ton*… but I had no idea! I just went, 'Oh, apparently that's what electric guitars weigh!'"

TELE VISIONS

Urban remained a Strat devotee throughout his early years in Australia, but at the tail end of the 80s, he encountered a guitar that would become his most trusted sidekick for years to come – a 1989 Fender Custom Shop 40th Anniversary Telecaster. While it's an instrument from a period that's not exactly held in high regard by vintage aficionados ("the Edsel era of Fender!" he jokes) it was a guitar that had a whiff of destiny about it for Urban.

"When I first came to America in 1989, I went to New York with my manager at the time, and we went to Manny's [Music], because it was so legendary

I just wanted to go there," he remembers. "I also really wanted to find a nice Telecaster, because I'd never owned one. And so I walked in and there, and the in front of me was a glass box with this Telecaster guitar inside, that just looked gorgeous. I think it was $2,400 – ridiculously expensive, and way more money than I had.

"But asked the shop assistant if I could play it anyway, and I'll never forget the way he just looked at me and goes, 'Yeah alright… but take your belt off, take your jacket off… bracelet off…' Anything that could scratch the 'Mona Lisa'! Then I played it and just loved it immediately – it was like the most effortless, beautiful sounding thing. So I borrowed some money from my manager, bought it, and went back to Australia."

Urban would use the Tele to record his self-titled debut album the following year, but despite being a professional musician, he found himself in a situation that many of us can relate to…

"When I started touring, I didn't want to take my pride and joy out on tour," he says, shaking his head. "So I got this piece of crap Squier Strat to take out, but then I would come home from tour, and I'd pull that Anniversary Telecaster out from under my bed and go, 'Oh, I love this guitar! I wish I could play this on the road… oh, well, back under the bed!'

"And then one day, I was like, 'What do you mean 'Oh, well'!? Just play the bloody guitar!' So I took it out, and the first time it fell off a stand and got a scratch on it I was like, 'Alright, here we go! The gloves are now off.' And it became my road guitar from then on. It was so stupid."

A GOOD VINTAGE

In the years since, Keith has expanded his gear options dramatically – with a jaw-dropping selection of battle-hardened vintage guitars at his disposal at any given moment. Today in London, however, he's travelling light – with his arsenal scaled down to two guitars stowed in the Mono M-80 Dual gigbag propped up against the table next to us – they just happen to be an all-original 1951 Nocaster and a heavily worn 1964 Strat.

In recent years, the '64 has taken over from the Anniversary Tele as Keith's main onstage guitar, "his number one dance partner" in the words of his tech, Chris Miller, and it's an instrument that shares some of the effortless playability that made him love his Tele so much.

"The neck is quite thin for a '64, look you can feel it," he says handing us the guitar. "But it's really fast! I'm not sure if I got hoodwinked into buying this guitar by a very smart shop owner in Sydney! I went to try out an amp at this guitar shop, and I'm sitting by the amp and I'm like, 'Well, I need a guitar…' And I lean around to look at the wall of all these guitars, and right behind me is this 1964 Fender Strat.

"I JUST LOVE THAT SINGLE P-90 ON A LES PAUL JUNIOR. IT'S JUST A BASIC 'ALL YOU NEED' GUITAR. REALLY, IT'S THE GIBSON TELE, ISN'T IT?"

The guitar didn't leap out at me or anything, I just grabbed it to try the amp.

"But then I plugged it in, and I went, 'Oh my God, this guitar is amazing!' So I bought the amp *and* the guitar. And then later on I wondered, was he just being a really smart guy, and placed that guitar right behind me on the wall so I'd play it?!

"I have a love/hate relationship with this guitar, funnily enough. The effortlessness of it as a playing guitar means that I sort of squash it with the aggressiveness that I play with sometimes, and it just gets all thin and shitty – and I hate it for that. But then I just have to lighten up, and get back into it."

The other guitar in his gigbag, however, is in no danger of getting either thin *or* shitty…

"The '51 right here, this one's got more to it – as you can feel!" he exclaims as we get to grips with its monster neck. "I mean, it's a '51 Nocaster! It's got some real fight – it's not a friendly guitar!

"I wish it was easier to play, but once the adrenaline kicks in, it feels way easier. I keep tolerating it because this pickup is hands down the best I've ever played – it's the best pickup I've ever heard in my life. It's the original '51 – every single thing is stock on this guitar, except it's been refretted. The guy that owned that guitar for 20 years is Tom Kiefer from [1980s metal band] Cinderella. Apparently, that's the only guitar he had on all those Cinderella records, but then sold it to [fabled Nashville guitar store] Gruhn's and I went and bought it."

Despite being most at home on a Fender, Urban still has a deep love of Gibson guitars – particularly Les Paul Juniors, with three late-50s examples currently in his stable.

"I just love that single P-90, it's just a basic 'all you need' guitar," he enthuses. "I want to pick it up acoustically and know that it just roars, because then you're most of the way home. Really, it's the Gibson Tele, isn't it? In so many ways, with the simplicity of it – almost the crude simplicity – it's so appealing to me. There's nowhere to hide, which I really like as well."

His love of simple stripped back instruments doesn't mean Keith doesn't enjoy the finer things in guitar, however, as his most recent purchase attests…

"I just got a '58 Burst about two weeks ago," Urban reveals. "It's not 100 per cent original, which put it in a much more affordable range, but all the electronics, body, neck is all original… and it's just ungodly great! It's incredibly balanced. It's just got some beautiful, rich dimensions to all the harmonics, even acoustically – it's really quite magical.

"I've got a '58 Goldtop that I've had for a long time, which is hands down the best Gibson electric I've played, and I've compared some of those Bursts to that Goldtop and found myself going, 'Nah, the Goldtop's better!' But then I played this Burst and went, 'Okay, that's… that's a different thing to the Goldtop!'"

ABOVE One of Urban's trio of 1950s Les Paul Juniors; live in London, with a Maton

THIS PAGE Too rare for the road! Just one of Urban's five super-valuable Dumble heads; his vintage Fender Twin; the #001 Odyssey bass amp that was Alexander Dumble's own gigging mainstay in the 1960s

DUMBLE DRAW

Step into a room of guitar players and say the word 'Dumble' and it's likely an argument will ensue over the fabled amplifier creations of Alexander Dumble, but as someone who currently owns no less than five Dumble amps, Urban is perhaps better placed than most to comment on their merits.

"Y'know, I went down the rabbit hole last night on YouTube looking at Ben Harper's rig, Carlos Santana's rig and a few of the other Dumble cats… because I was just curious, you know? But the truth is that we all love them for the same reason – they just have these sonic dimensions, that are unlike any other amps.

"It was actually John Mayer set me down this path. It was maybe 12 years ago, I did a show with him, and I said, 'I'm interested in buying a Dumble…' and he said, 'Well, I've got a head I could sell you'. And he told me how much he wanted for it, and I was like, 'Oh my god, that's an *outrageous* amount of money for an amp!' But he said to me, 'Well how much is the most expensive guitar you have?' And I told him, and it was triple what the amp was. And he said, 'Right, so that's one guitar… what are you plugging that one guitar into?' And I was like, 'Yeah okay, I see where you're going here, John!'

"It was the best argument for an expensive amp I've ever heard in my life. Because he said, 'Okay, so you don't know if you want to spend all of this money on one amp, that you can plug all of your guitars in to. But how do you justify spending that much money on one guitar, but you don't want to spend that on an amp?' And I was like, 'Well… I guess I can't justify it, that's a really good argument.' And so I bought his amp."

Any Dumble is obviously pretty special, but Keith's most recent acquisition is a very special one indeed – an Odyssey bass amp with the serial number 001, and a very fine pedigree.

"I only just got this recently, and so I contacted Alexander and asked him if he knew about the amp," he explains. "Apparently it was *his* amp, that he used to use touring around the Bayside area in the late 60s, so I was really giddy about that."

Alexander has a reputation for being a recluse, and something of a difficult character to deal with, but Urban's experience certainly alters that impression.

"It's been great!" he exclaims. "We email back and forth, and he's just a fascinating guy. What's crazy is how he doesn't see the financial results of his labours as much as all the owners have. He's a bit like Banksy – he's the Banksy of amp builders!"

TUBES DRIVER

Keith's Dumbles don't come with him on the road, and while his rig is somewhat in flux at the moment, he predominantly favours a mix of old Marshall Plexis for overdrive tones and Fender Dual Showman amp for clean headroom – though this is something of a recent development, as until recently he was using Fractal's Axe-Fx for all his live amp sounds. He still uses Fractal for all his live effects stuff, but he eventually found himself yearning for the physical punch of real amps

"I went down the Fractal route for a while, which started with a fascination with its consistency," he explains of his live backline. "But then I just missed… I don't know? What happens when a guitar signal goes through all those tubes and then goes into a speaker cone, and then all of that is mic'd… so I just went back to amps!

"I feel like we've gone through that little terrifying moment where amps were just about to go the way the horse and buggy! But there's nothing like the feeling of your guitar hitting the back of your shins. The way a guitar reacts with an amplifier… there is no substitute for the harmonic things that happen because of that resonating relationship.

"And it's a trade-off, too, because do you *want* consistency? Because that's not going to be consistent – amps are just not gonna be! But in the end, it was worth it for me. Because a mannequin is consistent, but you don't want to date a mannequin!"

Keith Urban's seven-date UK tour begins on 5 May 2020 at the Eventim Apollo, London. For tickets and more information, visit keithurban.net

THIS PAGE Urban's 1952 Goldtop and his Dumble Overdrive Special (all gear shot in Nashville); soundchecking in London

MUSIC TRUMP(ET)S WAR

Once upon a time, there was a man with a trumpet. And when he was a soldier in the US Army landing on the beaches of Normandy, he kept it by his side. Once, when he was standing guard at night, his captain told him: "Don't play tonight, there's a sharpshooter out there." But our man thought: "That guy out there is just as scared and lonely as me. I'll play a piece for him." The next day, a POW was brought into the camp, and he asked: "Who is the trumpeter that played 'Lili Marleen' last night? When I heard that song, the war was over for me - I just couldn't use my gun any more." The man with the trumpet was called Jack Leroy Tueller. And though it may sound like a fairy tale, this is a true story. A story only music can write.

th•mann

MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

ROAD MACHINES

Despite their angular beauty, Rival Sons guitarist Scott Holiday isn't the sort of player who suspends his guitars behind glass like six-string butterflies – his most treasured instruments are always at his side, ready to rock at a moment's notice. We head to Holiday's LA home to get up close and personal with the highlights of his achingly cool collection...

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE **PHOTOGRAPHY** ELEANOR JANE

As riffmeister general with soulful US hard-rock sensations Rival Sons, Scott Holiday makes no apologies about *loving* guitars and gear. If you've seen the multiple Grammy-nominated band play live – and if you haven't, you should – you'll doubtless have noticed the frequent guitar changes, labyrinthine pedalboard and wall of Orange and Supro amps from which Holiday generates the colossal rock tones emanating from stage left.

Guitar.com last sat down with Scott Holiday and Sons' frontman Jay Buchanan on a press tour in London, prior to the release of their 2019 LP, *Feral Roots*. When Scott was kind enough to invite us to his California home to get a forensic look at his guitar collection, it was too good an opportunity to pass up.

Holiday is based just a few blocks away from the spray of the surf on the famous Huntington Beach, and he grew up nearby. Before we start digging into his outrageous array of boutique hot-rods, offsets and vintage pieces, it's time to find out how his obsession with the guitar began.

FAMILY SOUNDS

"There's no musicians really in my family, but I had one uncle that played and recorded," Holiday recalls. "He was living with my grandma still, and I could hear a bunch of music going on. It was way too loud, all coming out of this bedroom. And I popped the door open – and this was the 80s 'cause I was a real little kid – and he had a whole electronic drum kit set up, big octagon pads. He had a full mixing console in there, an eight-track or something, reel-to-reel. He had a guitar on, he had the harmonica thing… he had a whole bunch of doodads!

"I remember walking in and going, 'Oh my gosh! How do you use those things?' And he explained it to me, and I remember being really mesmerised. I was really young, but it was a lasting impression."

Holiday also attributes his fascination with music in general to his parents: "They were really young parents and they partied a lot when I was young. It all revolved around music. Tonnes of rock 'n' roll, Van Halen, ZZ Top, and stuff like that around. It was just a fun time for music. I think I had a fascination with wanting to be at the source of their fun, because they had so much fun listening to it. I just became hellbent on playing music from a young age."

RITE OF PASSAGE

Despite plenty of nagging, it was a few years until young Scott got a guitar of his own. "I think I was maybe 11 when I got a classical guitar given to me by my stepdad. I didn't get too absolutely out of control on it, but I started to learn stuff on that and teach myself things, like *Rock Lobster* by The B-52's or pick out theme songs on TV like *Peter Gunn*, *The Pink Panther*… just making sound on this thing!

"Then by 12 an uncle gave me a Hondo II Les Paul replica. Unfortunately, I'm such a dickhead that I took the whole thing apart. That was my first guitar rig, that guitar and a little tiny Fender solid-state amp and my first pedal was a DOD Supra Distortion given to me by my grandmother. My family always supported me – thank you guys – and although they had no clue where it was all coming from, they were into it, y'know."

By now, Holiday was *really* into it. "I took a handful of lessons, then I was self-taught from that point on. I just never put the guitar down. You come right home from school and you pick it up. I've got the new Guns N' Roses record and I'm learning every single song on there, or I'm learning old stuff, lots of soul and rock 'n' roll – I was constantly having to pick new things up.

"I was addicted to guitar magazines, which is why I love doing these interviews with good people like yourself! Those were my lifeline, a bible for me as a child; I just lived in and out of these magazines and kept 'em and had stacks of 'em around my room.

"And even the lessons in those magazines – being self-taught that was a big thing for me. It's different now, because the internet is so immediate and overwhelming. I sound like the old man, 'Get off my lawn!' But I think there's something romantic about the fact that when that magazine came, you were stoked off your ass when it was in your mailbox, you couldn't get into it quick enough, that was all you had for the month so you had to really take it apart and get into every single section."

GUITAR SURGERY

As time went by, Scott began to be fascinated not just by the sounds guitars made, but also their anatomy and inner workings. Bad news for the aforementioned Hondo…

"Anything I could get my hands on, I'd try to mess with it, look inside of it, switch pickups out, mess with potentiometers, tremolos, anything," he remembers. "I didn't paint so much, but I did pull the neck off that Hondo and I think I tried to put an Ibanez Roadstar neck on it – I don't know why! It's a stupid idea but I was going, 'Oh! Let's make some Frankenstein stuff!'

"You read enough about guys like Eddie Van Halen that took shit apart and really came up with their own thing… it just became part of my thing as a kid, too.

Scott Holiday at home –"I was addicted to guitar magazines, which is why I love doing these interviews!"

"I've switched out every pickup known to man by this point, but I started doing it then. But that guitar's gone… it died… I think I had to open up the neck joint so the Ibanez neck would fit. I got it on there but what do you know? Things didn't really line up right. So here we learn, there's some real precision in this guitar-making shit! There's actually a science to it and they are probably measuring shit!"

After a stint with a Floyd Rose-equipped Aria Pro II bought for him by his mother – which he describes as a "full 80s machine... a quality instrument but a hair-band guitar, which wasn't my jam" – and brief but significant encounters with store owners' vintage ES-335s and Strats, Scott ended up with a two-knob 1980s Strat courtesy of the high-school jazz band.

"It was sand-coloured. I just fell in love with it, and that was the guitar I used in all my bands at that point. I was like, 'This is killer.' And you know what? I just kept it.

"I swear to god I'm going to return the favour to the school – I still have to do it and I'm going to in the near future – but I just kept it and that was my entry to a USA-made Fender Strat. It was really cool. And I was a Strat guy for a lot of years, probably because of that."

1999 GIBSON CUSTOM FIREBIRD VIII AKA 'BLUEBIRD'

It's time to check out guitars from Scott's current collection and the first he pulls out for our inspection is a Gibson Firebird that arrived in his life at a pivotal moment in 2009. After bouncing between projects and record labels, the puzzle pieces had fallen into place.

With the enviable pipes of Jay Buchanan onboard, Rival Sons completed their debut studio album, *Before The Fire*, with esteemed producer Dave Cobb and the future was bright – but Scott needed a darker guitar than a Strat to replicate the tones he'd created in the studio.

"I was using a bunch of guitars on *Before The Fire*. Dave Cobb has a crazy guitar collection; we used all these guitars of his, plus a bunch of my weird guitars. When we were done, the guitar sounds had a certain kind of hot sauce. I had a mid-70s Strat in mocha brown and I was like, this guitar doesn't look like the way this record sounds to me, at all. And it certainly isn't going to sound like that – I'd used an Epiphone Casino, mixed in with Les Pauls and all kinds of vintage stuff. The Strat ain't gonna do it. There's no way. So I have to look for a guitar that looks and sounds like this band and this album to me.

"I was obsessive at that point about finding new guitars and trading. I'd come off a record deal with Atlantic so I had guitars and vintage stuff – I could mess around and have fun. In Teaneck, New Jersey, I found this Firebird and it looked similar to what it looks like now; I think it had been aged somewhere else and it looked *really* good. I've put a shitload more years on it, so most of the wear you see on that guitar is from me, 'cause I've had it for a long time and it was my number one.

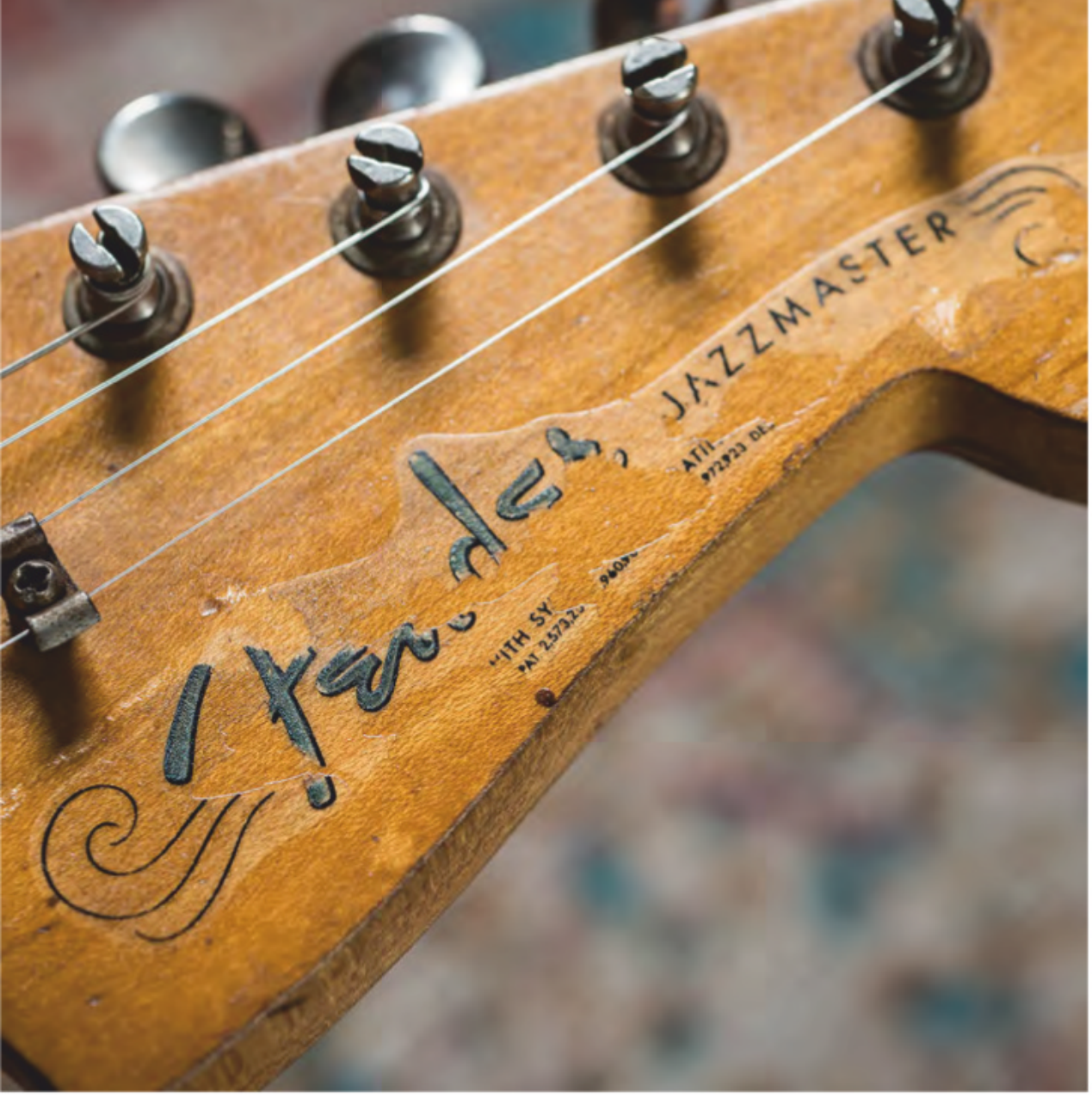
"When I got it, I thought, 'Holy shit, this is a big neck. And it feels long-scale, almost like a baritone or something. I'm not used to this guitar.' But I learned that I *love* that. This thing was like wrestling with a bear. It taught me how to play guitar in a different way, and I never looked back. You're not doing any sweep-picking bullshit, you are attacking the guitar in a different way. You are making the notes count. And that guitar kind of taught me that and I really love that.

"All my guitars are beat-up in the cutaway and up high because I wear this Jetslide that I flip around – I'm unconscious of it when I'm playing live, so it just whacks the shit out of it. I replaced all the pickups; I had the pickups rewound by my buddy Tom Short, and I replaced all the innards as well, different caps and stuff like that. And just kept the guitar well-maintained all these years.

"I have all these amazing looking instruments and I'm lucky to have them all, but this is one of my faves, still. Fun guitar.

"And at the time, nobody played Firebirds, and I wanted to do my own thing. It makes so much sense – I'm a car guy and this guitar being co-designed by Ray Dietrich at Pontiac. I like the whole thing; the logo, the colour. And the pickups being humbuckers, but also having a little snap almost like a Strat or a Tele – it was exactly what I needed. It really was the beginning of something awesome for me."

1962 FENDER JAZZMASTER AKA "JAZZY"



"I got this because I had guitar fever," Scott remembers of this much-loved and extremely vibey vintage offset. "I only had one guitar that would work and I didn't want to use that Strat anymore, it had to go. I was combing for a Jazzmaster really hard and found that thing at a pretty cheap price. I had no money, but I did have a credit card! It wasn't even from an electric guitar shop – it was a really hidden, gypsy-jazz guitar shop. The guy just happened to get this thing in on a trade and he wanted to burn it really quick.

"Still one of the best purchases I ever made. The last year of the slab 'board. The way it looks now is how it looked when I got it, except for a lot more wear. That guitar's been around the world several times. It was my number two. I replaced the pickups in it because much as I love the old pickups, they didn't make sense for what I was doing.

"The pickups in there are Lollars, and it's the most pleasing pickup swap I've ever done. From what it sounded like to what it sounded like after I put those Lollars in? I was like, Oh my god, this thing's breathing fire now! Even [luthier] Doug Kauer comes to my shows and says, 'I think that's the best-sounding guitar.' He's got like five of his own guitars in my rack and still says that this is his favourite!

"The colour might be a refin but if it was, it was done in '63 because it's beat-in. Those Blackface amp knobs you can tell are old original ones. It was like that when I got it, it's just perfect. And it's early enough that it has that Fender thing where all the lacquer has worn off the back of the neck and it's just raw wood. It doesn't feel like the new ones… it feels like somebody made this neck and shaped it. It feels different as you move up, it just feels like somebody made it with their hands.

"It's got inconsistencies that have become beautiful and feel natural, just like the 50s Strat I played when I was a kid. It just has that thing. It's one of the most magical guitars I own, if not *the* most magical guitar. That guitar will be out of tune when you look at it on the tuner, and it sounds in-tune. There's something about the overtones and the way that it rings – it can be knocked out a little and you don't even notice it. It's magic!"

KAUER BANSHEE AKA 'EXCALIBUR'

Scott's collaborations with Doug Kauer see Gibson and Gretsch influences collide with considerable style. His first Kauer – a gold Firebird-style Banshee model with pinstripes – is currently in the repair shop, but we get to grips with Excalibur, the first custom instrument that Holiday was heavily involved in spec'ing out.

"This is really the first guitar where I make appointments and decide what I want to have on the guitar," Scott reveals. "I wanted to get into Filter'Tron pickups – I'd played some and thought they were right up my alley. I love this guitar so much. I got it when we were making [2014 album] *Great Western Valkyrie*, and I used it for almost the entire record. It came to the studio and right out of the box, those TV Jones Filter'Trons became my best friends! I think there's a Magna'Tron in the middle and the other two are a Power'Tron Plus at the bridge, and a Power'Tron in the neck.

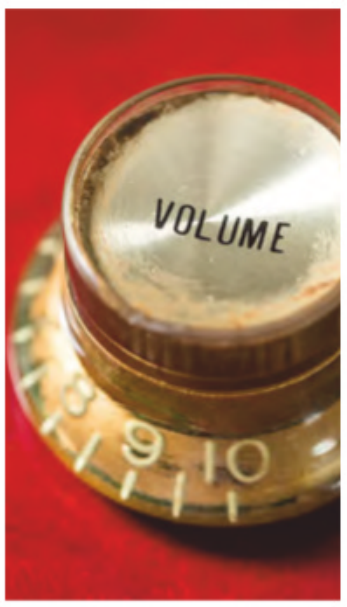
"The binding, the colour, the Bigsby, how we wired that middle pickup, the Steinberger tuners that I had put on my Gibson – these were all appointments that I was really specific about. Great, great guitar. Love that instrument. It's still one of my favourites that I've done with Doug."

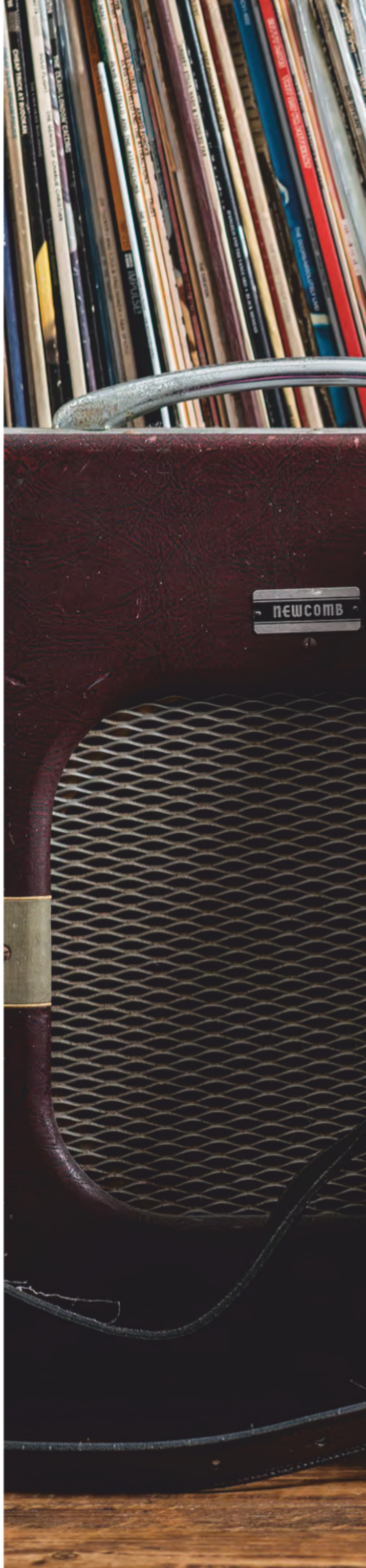
DOUBLE TROUBLE

Holiday acquired his mid-1970s walnut **Gibson EDS-1275** doubleneck in the early days and used it before Rival Sons had even settled on a band name. Although it was put away for a while, it's recently seen stage action again. And though Scott was eagerly awaiting the arrival of a custom Kauer Super Chief doubleneck at the time of our interview, it doesn't mean the vintage Gibson is set to be retired any time soon.

"Believe it or not, it won't," he says. "On this record, I use the doubleneck for three songs we play live, every night. And I have two tunings that I use. So right now, my poor fucking tech has to change the tuning on the fucking double-neck 12-string and it's brutal! I use a DADDAD tuning – the middle Ds are droning – and I use a DADGAD as well. So it's a real bitch for my tech. And it's capo'd! On *Feral Roots* I use a capo. So he's just like, 'For fuck's sake! Are you kidding me?!'

"We kind of have to formulate the setlist, so it's realistic for him not to want to kill himself or me. This new Kauer will alleviate that – I'll actually be playing *two* doublenecks live. I know it's over the line, but it's necessity. You are either going to love me or hate me! [laughs]"





KAUER SUPER CHIEF AKA 'LA DONNA ROSSO'

Scott's latest squeeze is the result of a conscious decision to move away from solidbody electrics. "I wanted to play a lot more semi-hollows and 335-type guitars," he explains. "This guitar that Doug built me – I love the shape and the aesthetic and his quality is second to none. This guitar is essentially a copy of his personal one, with the colour and the pickups and all that. It was such a brand-new guitar that I needed to get it re-setup when it got to me, but after those little adjustments it became the *Greatest. Instrument. Ever.*

"It had something that was really, really inspiring. Even when Dave Cobb picked it up – who is this guitar snob, over the line! – he went, 'This is the best guitar you have. This is maybe the best new guitar I've ever played. There's songs in this thing.'

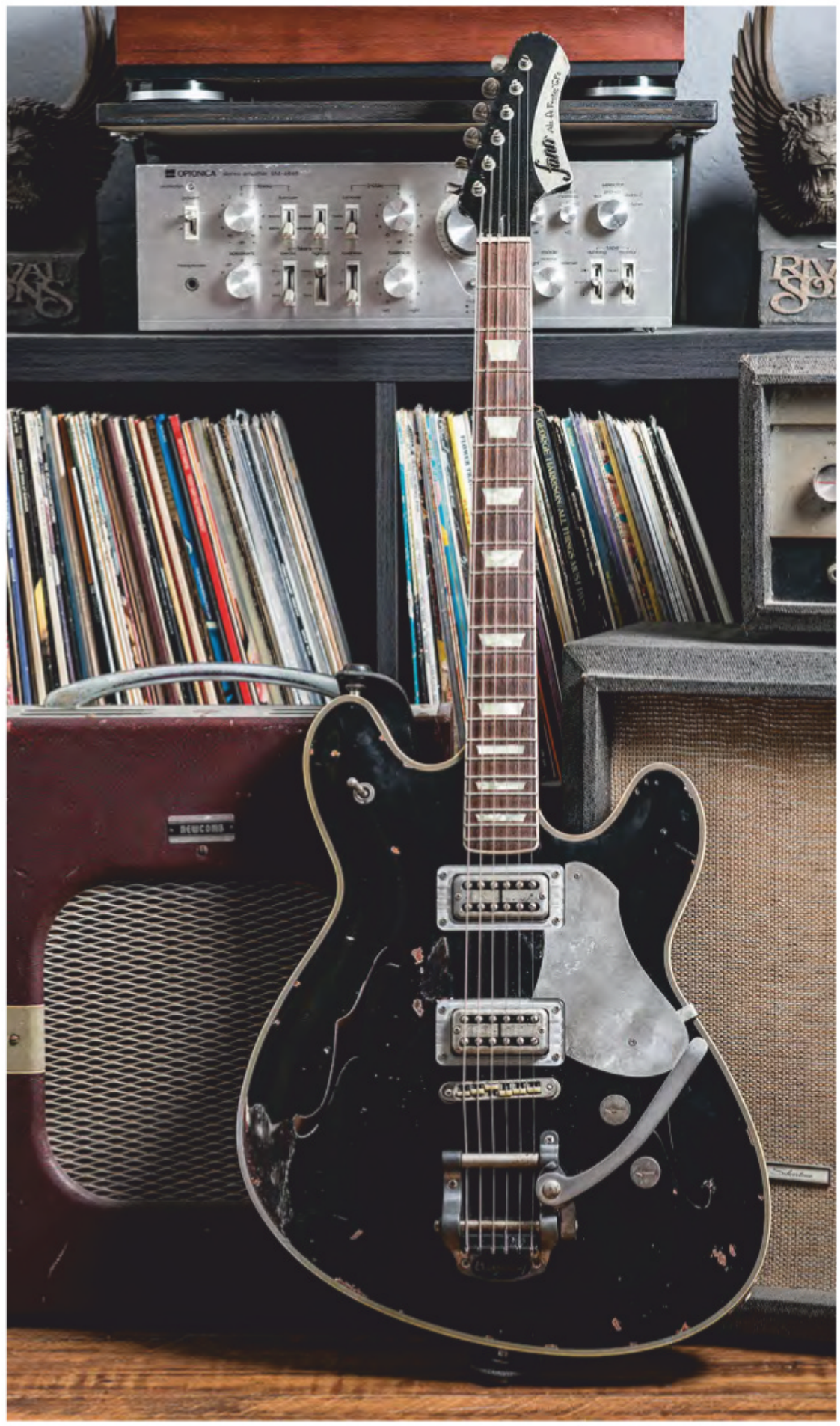
"I ended up using that all over the *Feral Roots* record. It's quite a Swiss army knife. There's WolfeTone KauerBuckers under the screens and Doug puts in a thing that allows you to split the coil, flip the phase, and it's got like a cocked wah… that's what those little toggles do.

"Instead of picking up different guitars for different parts on the record, or for doubling to be texturally different, this guitar was different enough that I could go, 'What if I keep it in the middle, flip the phase, turn it down a little bit? That's an entirely different sound.' It's great, a really trusty guitar! Everybody go buy a Super Chief, they're killer. All those shitty guitars? Go sell those and buy one of these! [laughs]"

GOING DEEP

One of the most unique instruments in Scott's idiosyncratic collection is the single-pickup, Bigsby-loaded **Kauer Banshee Baritone** he nicknamed 'Organa Major' – a *Star Wars* reference that came about because looking at its black sparkle finish feels like staring into deep space.

"I don't know if he's even done another baritone," says Scott. "For [2016 LP] *Hollow Bones*, I recorded parts one and two of the title track with Dave Cobb's Jerry Jones Danelectro-style baritone. Literally, when I finished recording those I called Doug and went, 'I know these songs are gonna be on the record... I need a baritone, dude. You need to start building one or I won't be able to play these songs live!' It's really special, really cool."



TOP LEFT & LEFT This unique semi was conceived by Scott and built by the **Yamaha Custom Shop**. Although it's not a production guitar at present, Dave Catching and Butch Walker have also had versions built for them and it's currently Scott's live back-up and hotel-room guitar. "Personally I think it's one of the coolest things Yamaha's ever made and it should go into production," says Scott. We heartily agree!

ABOVE & TOP RIGHT Scott has two guitars built by French company **Meloduende**. The aluminium Billy Bo-style model was Christened 'Tin-Tin' by Holiday's son, while the larger-bodied semi with copper plates is called 'Penny'. "It's the coolest-looking guitar ever made," Scott says of the latter. "And it plays and sounds as cool as it looks. It's fucking spectacular. It should be in a museum!"

RIGHT "I use the shit out of this guitar," remarks Scott of this gorgeous **Fano** GF6. "I've loved Dennis's work forever. I'm working on a Novo with him right now. But when he sold his company, Premier Builders Guild wanted to give me a guitar. It came out really cool, but they over-aged it in my opinion. If you look at the picture, you can see where I decided to use a paint pen and cover it up! It doesn't matter, I think it looks fantastic and sounds really beautiful."

GRETSCH CUSTOM SHOP STEPHEN STERN MASTERBUILT BLUE PENGUIN

Next we turn our attention to a guitar that might just be our pick of the whole bunch. What's cooler than a Gretsch Penguin? How about one with three pickups, in blue?

"Stephen Stern became one of my favourite luthiers and somebody I paid attention to," Scott reveals when we ask how the guitar came about. "On [2011 album] *Pressure & Time*, I used Dave Cobb's Custom Shop White Penguin frequently – it had a lot to do with the sound of that record. And also on *Head Down* [2012] I used that guitar a lot. We couldn't say enough nice things about it; we just loved the shit out of that guitar. It just felt like a real '59 Penguin… this thing was like the real deal!

"So I fell in love with Stephen's work and Gretsch particularly. That was probably when I fell in love with that Gretsch aesthetic as well. I always had it in the back of my head that I would do something with Stephen. Then recently Fred Gretsch wrote me, and we were talking about all the Bigsbys that I have on all my guitars and our relationship, and he was really gracious over there and asked me if I wanted to do something with them. And I said no, I've got it covered, thank you, but I have all the Bigsbys I need.

And then I thought, wait a minute! I need to hook up with Stephen…

"So I wrote Fred back and said 'I want to work with Gretsch, I want to do something, I don't know what I was thinking! I *do* want something!' I joked with them and said I'd had this guitar in my photos that I've carried around in my phone for years – you guys made this Blue Penguin guitar and I literally told myself, I'm getting this one day, I need to find it. Well, they only made one of 'em ever, and I decided I wanted to see if I could get Stephen to build me that.

"They were super-stoked to have me work with them. Me and Stephen hooked up, talked guitars and got nerdy. He wanted to do it, it got approved and we did that guitar together. So there's now two of them in existence and mine probably sounds better because it has the pickups I like in it! Other than the TV Jones Power'Tron pickups that I love, I didn't really change anything. They were trying to get me to do a signature on the 'guard – I hate that shit! I don't put my name on it. I play it. It's a Gretsch; Stephen, *you* put your name on it, then I'm good!

"It basically looks like a 1959 Blue Penguin and if it was from that era, it would be worth a million dollars. This one isn't – but it plays like it! It's really unbelievable. This is the other guitar that I used on the new album the most. My two best friends were this Gretsch and the Kauer Super Chief. They sound entirely different, but based on that Gretsch being chambered and the pickups, the way those Gretsches play, they're really airy and open-sounding.

"With the Power'Tron Plus and Power'Trons in there, they get really robust and strong. So you get this juxtaposition that works beautifully and has become a bedrock of my tone. That's one of the Rival Sons guitar sounds that I think is quintessential: these Filter'Tron pickups, with a little bit of gain it has an airier, earthier kind of woody sound that's still real big. It fills up a lot of space, and as the only guitar player, that's important."

Scott Holiday's enthusiasm for all things guitar is thoroughly infectious. Before we wrap up, the conversation turns to yet another custom instrument that's on the drawing board – we wonder if he'll ever run out of ideas for new builds and collaborations.

"How can I have so many fucking guitars and still be excited?" he laughs. "I feel like I'm like the Grinch of guitar players, or like the greediest… the Scrooge McDuck of guitarists! I have a doubleneck coming and I'm still trying to build another guitar. I'm the king of GAS, man!" Long may he reign. G

Gibson's Made 2 Measure programme takes the Custom Shop experience to another level – and we're giving you the chance to win the Les Paul of your dreams, worth **over £5,000…**

CUSTOM SHOPPING

Between the high ceilings and polished concrete floors of Gibson's loft-style London Showroom hangs a glittering array of desirable guitars. The exclusive space is located just off Oxford Street and is an invite-only musicians' hangout fully equipped for intimate live performances, fashion events, album launches and plenty more besides. Inside, you'll find dozens of stunning instruments from the Nashville company's impressive 2019 range, alongside other Gibson Brands products and guitars that have spent time on the road with megastars such as Prince, Slash and Paul McCartney.

The newest addition to the showroom is the Made 2 Measure lounge, where you can make your dream Les Paul a reality. Although you'll first need to arrange an appointment through a participating dealer, rather than simply spec'ing out a custom instrument, the M2M lounge keeps dozens of high-grade centre-joined maple top blanks in stock so you can hand-pick the actual top that will end up on your guitar.

Once you've picked a top and decided on a basic chassis based on a model year – '58, '59, '60, for example – the lounge is equipped with colour swatches, neck, hardware, pickup and plastics

Dreams can come true at the new Gibson Made 2 Measure lounge in London

ABOVE In our competition, the finish choice will be Vintage Lemon Burst, Vintage Dark Burst or Washed Cherry Burst

RIGHT We hand-picked these three deliciously figured tops for you to vote on – the most popular option will be used for the final competition prize

samples, so you can tailor every aspect of the instrument to suit your needs. You can even choose a specific finish based on a vintage Les Paul Standard from the *Beauty Of The Burst* book. The top then gets sent off to the Gibson Custom Shop in Nashville along with your spec sheet and a few months later, your dream guitar will be delivered.

Made 2 Measure isn't an option for every budget, but thanks to our friends at Gibson, we're giving you the opportunity to help spec out a M2M Les Paul and be in with a chance of winning the finished guitar.

THE GUITAR.COM COMPETITION – HOW IT WORKS

With an almost infinite number of permutations available, to help narrow things down, *Guitar.com*'s Chief Editor Chris Vinnicombe recently visited the Made 2 Measure lounge and hand-selected a trio of killer tops, which you can see here, along with our three favourite finish options – Vintage Lemon Burst, Vintage Dark Burst and Washed Cherry Burst.

When you follow the link on the facing page, you'll be able to vote for your choice of '58, '59 or '60 Les Paul Standard base model (including neck shape) and one of the three tops and colours we've selected.

We've opted for a VOS finish and the same alnico III unpotted Custombuckers that were so impressive in the 60th Anniversary R9 which won Best Premium Electric Guitar in our 2019 Gear Of The Year awards – but you'll also be able to vote for whether you want the pickups covered or uncovered.

Everyone who casts a vote will be entered into a competition to win the finished guitar which, in the true spirit of democracy, will be spec'd out based on the results of the poll. We'll also keep you updated with work-in-progress shots of the build on our social channels. The people's Les Paul? You bet. But there can be only one lucky winner…

Terms & Conditions

The closing date is **23:59 GMT, 6 February 2020**. The company's decision is final. The competition is open to UK residents only. When entering Guitar Magazine competitions, you will be given the option to receive details of future promotions from BandLab UK Limited and related third parties. If you do not want to receive this information, you can opt out. This giveaway is open to over 18s only. For full terms and conditions, please go to bnd.la/gm-ctos.

HEAD TO GUITAR.COM/ COMPETITIONS TO VOTE AND ENTER

THE POLL CLOSES 6 FEBRUARY 2020

GOOD LUCK!

Gibson's Made 2 Measure lounge offers a unique boutique experience

THE MONEY SHOT

1963 FENDER ESQUIRE

There aren't many cooler electric guitars than Fender's single-pickup solidbody and this is a particularly sweet collector-grade example from ATB Guitars in Cheltenham, UK. Aside from a few minor dings, this instrument is in time-capsule condition, replete with an abundance of case-candy and its original 'ashtray' bridge cover.

Brazilian rosewood veneer fingerboards replaced the previous slab arrangement on Esquires in mid-1962, and this '63 model's fretboard has a rich, chocolatey hue and is in unworn condition, with only very slight evidence of fret-wear. Its headstock decal is also in pristine condition and the hardware is rust-free.

Opening the orange-lined, black Tolex case the guitar was sold with provides a similar thrill and sense of excitement as it would have some 57 years ago, and inside we find the original manual, strap, cloth, strings, picks and Selmer guitar polish. Pre-CBS Fenders don't come much more factory-original than this!

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BEST IN SHOW

There are countless reasons to visit the Netherlands – now you can add Europe's biggest vintage guitar show to the list. We head to Vintage Guitar Show Veenendaal to find out more…

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

Vintage Guitar Show Veenendaal takes place twice a year in central Netherlands and is Europe's biggest event dedicated to vintage guitar gear, with around 100 exhibitors and over 1,200 guitars. Myself and fellow *Guitar.com* contributor Ed Oleszko have known about the show for a while now, and with our good buddy Daniel Nicolas offering a place to stay and a ride to the show… well, why not?

After a flight from Bristol to Schiphol, we head towards Amsterdam city centre on the bus. We alight at the magnificent brick-built Olympic Stadium and take the short walk to Daniel's apartment.

Arriving in Amsterdam the day before the show gives us the opportunity for an extra night out. Festivities begin at Daniel's local guitar shop, Sound Plaza, where we enjoy the hospitality of the shop's owner Arnoud Holsboer and his sales assistant Florian Ras, and have a fine time playing some of the guitars from Arnoud's vintage Gretsch collection. He keeps them on display at the back of the shop, so if you're in town, do pay Sound Plaza a visit.

On show day, we load-up on fresh croissants and coffee and are joined by Daniel's friend Roberto Briganti – a bespectacled Beatles-lover who is joining us for the day.

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Up The Junction

The journey to Veenendaal *should* take about an hour from central Amsterdam. Daniel takes a wrong turn, to Roberto's great amusement, but before too long we exit the A12 at Junction 23 and we're depositing the car in the multi-storey car park adjacent to the De Basiliek exhibition hall.

Walking through the entrance, the sea of faded denim, leather jackets and greying ponytails is an international uniform – it leaves us in no doubt that we're at a guitar show. There are a few areas to explore, and we begin in the smaller upstairs section, where two exhibitors have set up large and varied guitar displays.

One table has vintage Martin and Gibson acoustics, a 1932 National Duolian and a decent selection of 60s and 70s Fender and Gibson electrics. There's even a black Eko acoustic that once belonged to Neil Young. The other has its prime pieces, including a 1955 Gretsch 6120 and a mid-1960s P-90 equipped non-reverse Firebird, laid out on the top, with a selection of vintage Kalamazoo, Gibson, Cromwell and Martin acoustics casually leaning against the table at the far end. The hotch-potch nature of the displays is all part of this type of show's appeal.

Hall Of Wonders

It's an encouraging start but in comparison, the main exhibition hall is almost overwhelming. The walls and ceiling are black, the concrete floor is polished and the lighting makes the colours of the guitars pop. It's a large space that's absolutely full of droolworthy guitar gear. We wait a few moments for the excitement to subside and decide to approach things methodically, one aisle at a time.

There are some very noticeable differences between the Veenendaal show and most of the other guitar shows we attend. For starters, it's unusually quiet and nobody is doing the too-loud 'pentatonic twitch' that so often makes the experience an ordeal.

People come here to see old friends, hang out and enjoy a chat as they amble around. The atmosphere is very relaxed, with all the guitars laid out on trestle tables for everybody to pick up and try. We feel obliged to ask permission, but it hardly seems necessary.

We see only a couple of guitars with 'do not touch' signs, and since both are 1950s Bursts, that seems entirely reasonable. Then again, moments after starting a conversation with their owner, he's pulled them from their 'Cali Girl' cases for us to try out.

1-3 (opposite) The Vintage Guitar Show in Veenendaal is the biggest of its kind in Europe

4 What price perfection? This 1958 Gibson Les Paul appeared to be absolutely mint

5 This '59 Burst was a refin, but still a thing of wonder

6 One of three original 1950s Gibson Les Paul Goldtops at the show. All these Gibson classics were on one stand

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7 A 1926 Gibson L-1 in a natural finish with a '65 Hummingbird beside it

8 This fabulous Gibson J-200 came with its own matching cowboy case with faux cowhide!

9 A fine example of an early Gibson Harp Guitar

10, 12 (opposite) Fender Strats from the 50s to 70s were well represented

11 Close-up of a 1965 Harmony Rocket

13 This Epiphone Crestwood had plenty of pawn-shop charm

One is a seemingly mint '58 and the other is a '59 that was restored and refinished by Florian Jaeger, and retrofitted with vintage parts.

Other vintage Gibson electric highlights include three 1950s Goldtops, a dot neck '61 ES-335, a smattering of ES-175s and a stunning 1950 ES-5. On the acoustic side, we spot a natural top 1926 L-1 and a 1965 Hummingbird, a fabulous J-200 with a matching cowboy case lined with faux cowhide, and an early Gibson Harp Guitar.

Naturally, other classic names were in plentiful supply as well. Vintage Stratocasters are particularly well represented, with plenty of all-original and high-quality refinished instruments from the 1950s, 60s and 70s. There are no Blackguard Teles, but we try out a '69 with a factory-fitted Bigsby, a '77 Thinline and a refinished '59 Esquire. Jazzmasters are plentiful too, and Daniel is sorely tempted by a beaten-up black Musicmaster.

Considering the location, it's no surprise there's a plethora of European-made six-stringed curios. We spot plenty of Höfners, Ekos and even Wandres – including a bass that is bizarre even by Wandre's eccentric standards.

And even the USA instruments are not all über high-end. We're taken with a black Epiphone Crestwood, complete with batwing headstock, a '65 Harmony Rocket and a stunning early-60s Silvertone H-75. But everywhere we look, there are interesting and unusual guitars.

As always with vintage guitars, it's a case of buyer beware. More than once we're discussing the originality of a finish or the possibility of a repair, only for an exhibitor to slide up and say, "there's a bit of a story behind this one". Even if these stories are true, you should always consider how convincing they will be if you need to sell the guitar further down the line.

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There are fewer amps than we expected, but there are some tweed Fenders, several Marshalls and a nice-looking Selmer with mock-croc covering. It's a similar story with pedals, although one exhibitor sells vintage pedals almost exclusively and the selection impresses, with early Ibanez units and collectible Big Muffs. Pink Floyd fans would dig the Binson we found on show.

Some exhibitors are actually guitar builders, offering a variety of guitars from retro-themed to ultra-modern. There are also dealers selling parts, accessories, straps, slides, tubes and just about any piece of guitar-related paraphernalia you can think of.

The smallest section of the show encapsulates the Veenendaal spirit, as the show's organisers provide a separate space for members of the public to show their own guitars. Buying and selling is permitted and although the vibe is more 'cool second-hand' than 'vintage', we do spot a couple of nice 70s Telecasters.

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14 There were fewer amps on display than you might imagine, though there were a few stand-out tweed Fenders such as this Vibrolux

15-16 Vintage effects ranged from old Binson echo units of the 60s to now-classic Ibanez stompboxes

Jan's The Man

An awards ceremony is one of the Veenendaal show's highlights. There are two categories, with prizes for the most unusual and the most original vintage guitars. The first is a bizarre-looking 19th century parlour acoustic with upper frets inlayed into its spruce top and a steampunk coffin case. The second is a stunning SG Junior in rare TV Yellow, complete with its cardboard 'crocodile' case. Legendary Dutch guitarist Jan Akkerman is even on hand to present the awards.

Towards late afternoon, things are winding down. Roberto has found a Martin for one of his students, but the rest of us have resisted temptation. However, it's always the case that exhibitors selling parts and accessories are keen to shift stock late, and we each come away with several sets of bargain strings.

Daniel thankfully gets us back to Amsterdam without further detours. A second night out is followed by a dawn dash to Schiphol airport and we're back home in time for a late morning brew.

Planes, Trains & Automobiles

Visiting guitar shows abroad, it clearly helps to have friends with whom you can stay – but even after adding parking costs to the flights, travelling to Veenendaal from Wales hasn't worked out much more expensive than return rail to London. The train services here are good, as are the buses.

Tempted? Traditional tourist accommodation in Amsterdam tends to be expensive, but the Van De Valk Veenendaal hotel is just five-minutes' walk from the show. It may be more convenient, as well as cheaper. 2020's Vintage Guitar Show Veenendaal show dates are 14 March and 19 September. Maybe we'll see you there… G

For more information, visit vintageveenendaal.eu

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SHOP TALK

CHRIS SWOPE
SWOPE GUITARS

WORDS DAVE HUNTER

Mix one part Fender, one part Gibson, some retro-modern Italian designs of the 1960s and loads of high-end quality and attention to detail. What have you got? A guitar that has fast become Ronnie Wood's main squeeze, for one thing – or, by its given name, a Swope

The solo luthier's lot is not an easy one. Despite the wealth of experience and skill backing him up, Chris Swope finds he's always scrambling for the next angle that will help keep it all above water. Even with guitars in the hands of a Rolling Stone, John Oates, Nashville ace Kenny Vaughan, Webb Wilder, Jimi Hazel, and a host of others, a humble craftsman needs to think business as well as art, and Swope has pursued a flurry of ideas to keep body and neck together.

In addition to his custom-grade guitars, a new entry-level line is just hitting the wall hangers, and an independent range of pickups could soon tickle the fancy of the after-market crowd. Meanwhile, Swope feels his new patent-pending redesign of an in-demand yet six-decades-old piece of hardware could be the thing that really pushes him over the top. Alongside all of this, Chris Swope has guitar-making chops to rival just about anyone on the boutique scene, but he started down this road much like so many of us who have been bitten by the bug.

"I was born not far from where I am right now," he tells us, "in Kansas City, Missouri. I am 52, so I came of age in the 80s. And the 80s, for me, covered junior-high to college-graduate. I was a total Beatles freak as a grade schooler, and George Harrison was my man. But I moved on. When Lennon was shot it was too sad for an eighth grade boy to listen to The Beatles for a long time, and I immediately turned to Led Zeppelin."

BIG APPLE BOUND

After high school, Swope headed to the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas, but the call of the guitar was too much to resist for long. Student digs behind the legendary Mass Street Music in Lawrence, run by proprietor and pre-war Martin aficionado Jim Baggett (a frequent guest on PBS's *Antiques Roadshow* back in the day), provided ample opportunity to re-charge between classes, and eventually for Swope gain his first significant hands-on experience in guitar-craft.

"I hung around there enough that he was like, 'Just go up to the shop! If you're not buying anything you might as well do something to help.' So that's how I got my start, because I never had any money, so it was all about learning how to make something that was not-great, better."

"YOU LEARNED THE WHOLE THING AT THE GIBSON CUSTOM SHOP. THAT WAS INVALUABLE"

After college, Swope followed his wife to New York City and found a job working for legendary guitar and bass maker Roger Sadowsky, where he became more thoroughly grounded in just about every aspect of electric luthiery. And not only that, but Sadowsky was the kind of mentor who was happy to cultivate abilities that might one day help his mentee fly the coop.

"Roger was so super cool," Swope recalls of some truly formative years. "'Here's the keys to the shop, come in and work on your own stuff whenever you want.' We were right around the corner from 48th Street. When Roger had to move to Brooklyn in 2002 because the building kicked everyone out, I'd been [at his Manhattan location] a long time and I could walk to work.

"But I didn't want to take three trains to get over there. And also, Roger was giving up the repair business because he didn't think people from Manhattan were going to schlep over there. So I decided to see how the big boys are. Maybe I needed to move to Nashville."

NASHVILLE SKYLINE

Swope didn't have a gig to go to in Nashville, but had amassed a skillset that would likely land him something in the city well known as Guitar Town, USA. Being "in Roger's shop on evenings and Saturdays, I built my first Geronimo," he recalls: it was the guitar that would become both his debut and flagship model.

After interviews at both Fender and Gibson's Custom shop in Nashville, Swope took a job at the latter. At first, however, it was a shock to the system in terms of how different it was from Sadowsky.

"I equate Roger Sadowsky with Fezziwig," says Swope, "that character that Scrooge worked for when he was a young man, and he was just the best boss ever and would throw these big parties and love everyone. I really did have that relationship with Roger. And, I'm serious, man, I walked into Custom Shop the day I started and within 30 seconds I was thinking 'What *have* I gotten myself into?'

"I'm so glad I did it, and I learned so much. You know, when you're in the boutique world nothing leaves your bench until it's perfect, and it doesn't matter how long it takes. But Gibson Custom Shop, I had imagined, was a bunch of Gepettos at their benches doing works of art – but it's a factory, you know? It's a factory."

The Geronimo is Chris Swope's first design, with an offset alder body and his own OG (Original Geronimo) pickups

GOING TO GIBSON

At Gibson Custom, Swope started out in the Pro Shop, which his boss Ernie King referred to as 'the cavalry'. There, the special projects, repairs of unusual or vintage Gibsons, dealer exclusives, and one-offs that came through via the Custom Direct Program that was still thriving all combined to make the work interesting. Even so, this was still a big company, and there were those all-hands-on-deck moments when Swope would help look after the bottom line.

"Come 1:30 they'd be like, 'Oh, they're down a man in hand-sanding and they haven't hit their number. Slater, you go to hand-sanding. Somebody in fingerboard prep!' You got thrown into every capacity, so you learned the whole thing. That was invaluable.

"I still messed around with Geronimo, and I built another one the following year. But then I got a gig in the engineering department at Custom Shop, and I was like, 'This is what I want! This is pretty dream-scenario. Let me just put my nose to the grindstone here and maybe I can carve something out.' See, all I ever wanted was one photo of a guitar in a Tony Bacon book [laughs]."

GOING IT ALONE

After six years at Gibson, Swope was offered a job with Musician's Friend's Private Reserve division.

Chris Swope at his Nashville workshop with a new GTO model

Given the company's warehouse – also the warehouse for sibling company Guitar Center – was near his home turf in Kansas City, the move provided a return to familiar territory. He says he learned a lot about the high-end guitar scene et al, customer service, and dealing with other dealers – but after five years he was once again itching for a change.

"I was speaking with a guy who was a mentor to me," Swope recalls, "and I said, 'One day I'm going to have my own shop. I want to try to do something on the Sadowsky scale.' He said, 'You've got to do it *right now*...while you have the energy, or while your kids are young enough that you can recover if you fail… And he was right."

With the Geronimo in hand, and other models in the pipeline, Swope used his industry contacts to segue into his own business with orders on the books from day one. While he wouldn't call it an overnight success, some pretty big 'gets' came his way pretty quickly.

"I had demo guitars that I'd taken around to players. I'd accidentally sold one to John Oates of Hall & Oates, never intended that to happen – it was just like, 'Okay, just do it!' And I've been struggling ever since!"

"I'M A THREE-BUTTON SUIT GUY; ONCE IT GETS TOO PSYCHEDELIC I KIND OF STEP BACK"

DESIGN ETHOS

As one glance at the Strat-gone-Jetsons Geronimo or the retro-modern, Tele-inspired MG or GTO will tell you, Swope has had a consistent design ethos from the start, and it's one that was honed through his earliest days in the shop with Roger Sadowsky.

"The gig at Sadowsky was 50 per cent repair," he says, "and the coolest stuff in the world came through, hundreds of vintage guitars. I'm a mid-century modern guy, a 60s guy, three-button suit guy; once it gets psychedelic I kind of step back, go, 'Okay, my time has passed.' So that sort of *Mad Men* aesthetic is something I've always had.

"And, you know, the greatest electric guitars ever? There's no question: the Les Paul, the ES-335, the Telecaster, Stratocaster. But I also love Wurlitzers and Kapa Continentals, and all that oddball stuff from the 60s. I love that nobody is directly copying anybody. It's like, there is no after-market, there is no third-party suppliers, but 'We're going to wind our own pickups! We're going to get our own sewing-machine motor! We're going to make our own bridges!

"So that was kind of my idea," he continues. "Build a guitar that was like one of those guitars that wasn't a copy. Because at the time, even in 2002, [most boutique guitars] were copy guitars, the relic thing was starting. And they were like 'so-and-so's Telecaster and so-and-so's Strat.' It really has changed. Right now, there's so much wonderful, cool-looking stuff out there."

PICKUP THE PACE

One area Swope feels he's really able to make his mark is in the pickup department. All Swope guitars are constructed with in-house, original-design pickups wound by himself. As a result, they hit the streets loaded with tones which – even while broadly familiar – you just won't find anywhere else.

"There were those other interesting ideas at Gibson where someone was like, 'We need a new guitar design!' and it was always a *shape*. Here's a *shape*! 'What are we going to build it out of? How about mahogany? And let's put humbuckers in it, or let's put P-90s in it…' But they all sounded the same. Where is the 'close-your-eyes difference', you know?

"That's a thing that frustrated me with looking at the boutique market. How do I stand out? Because it's a cut-and-paste world. Many people say, 'Let's take an element of this guitar, and take an element

of that guitar; let's make our shape half this body half that body. And let's buy some admittedly kick-ass pickups from this pickup maker or that pickup maker…' I know what's in them, and if they are set up properly they are fantastic guitars. But how do I compete with that?

"So, essentially, what makes mine different is the pickups, more than anything else," he declares. "At Gibson I had this idea of marrying a lap-steel pickup with a Les Paul. What kind of offspring would they have? We all know Leo Fender went from lap-steels to the Telecaster in a decade, but who made all the lap-steels before that? Gibson! Gibson had been cranking out lap-steels forever, and the first guitar boom was the lap-steel boom, people buying in exotic music from Hawaii."

As such, Swope's pickups have generally married inspirations from lap-steel designs with those from traditional electric Spanish guitar pickups, and have universally become the most-talked-about feature of his own guitars as a result. Amid all the hype surrounding 'hand-wound' pickups, however, Swope declares that the essential skill is to create a great-sounding design that you can also replicate consistently rather than just nail the occasional superb example through the happy accidents that many vintage pickups relied on. To that end, he says, "I've got a *killer* winder. It's the most important piece I have, this $10,000 CNC pickup winder – that I still owe money on – that allows you to create this unique wind and replicate it.

"There's plenty of great tone in hand-wound pickups, but there's no two that sound alike. It's impossible. You're just there with your hand, going like that [mimes feeding wire onto a bobbin]. The pattern, the spacing, the number of turns, all the tension, it's all over the map. But you've got to be consistent. I remember Fender's sales pitch on the hand-wound stuff from the Custom Shop was, 'Each one's unique. You'll find your unique voice.' But what if I've spent $7,000 on a guitar and got poop?"

As well as the p'ups for his own guitars, Swope plans his own range of after-market pickups in standard Tele and Strat configurations in 2020.

BISCAYNE BAY

However distinguished one's creations might be, the boutique market is still a tough row to hoe these days. To that end, Swope has recently introduced a more affordable lineup, the Biscayne Series, which applies his full design and construction skills to a basic, semi-hollow, Danelectro-like range of guitars made with more affordable components, simpler pickups, coupled with solid cores and hardboard fronts and backs.

"The Biscayne is a way for me to have a guitar that players can mod," says Swope. "They can order pickups from me, they can use pickups out of their drawer, I'll throw in a pickguard that will direct-mount with the pickup route so they can put their DiMarzio Super Distortions in there – I don't care – the thing with the Biscayne is you've got to order it with at least one of my pickups in it when you buy it. What you do beyond that is up to you. I don't want to say 'the whole is greater than the sum of the parts,' because these are all awesome parts, but that is what Danelectro is to me."

RETHINKING THE PAST

Above and beyond all of this, though, it seems what is getting Chris Swope most excited these days is his major rethink of a piece of hardware that has been around since 1958. At the time of writing, Swope has just begun selling his own redesign of the popular Fender Jazzmaster/Jaguar-style vibrato tailpiece, dubbed the Descendant. In addition to presenting a smoother, more solid feel in use, the vibrato's design inherently improves the break-angle of the strings over the bridge, while correcting other long-standing issues with the original design.

"It has been 10 years in the making! Two years into it, I went through the provisional patent process, and now the non-provisional process – and it will be years before I find out whether I have the patent. But for now I have a limited amount of protection and I can start selling this – and that might be the thing that I actually can make a living from.

"I don't want to jinx it, but I really do feel that it does something that's needed, and it's not just for my own guitars; it's for every guitar that has ever had a Jazzmaster-style vibrato on it. It's gotta be hundreds of thousands of guitars. So, one way or another, I'm gonna get there!"

Find out more at swopeguitars.com

The new Descendant vibrato for Fender Jazzmaster/Jaguar-style guitars: "It's been 10 years in the making"

His new 'platform' Biscayne models are "built to modify" in two or three-pickup designations

ASK THE AMP TECH

In the latest instalment of his amp-advice column, Rift's Chris Fantana tackles the oft-misunderstood standby switch…

Have a burning question about your amp, or worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com

ABOVE Vintage Fender Bassman combos have a standby switch (third left), but what is the point?

Hi Chris. Is it true that I can damage my amp by not using the standby switch? And if so, why don't all amps have them?
PAUL, TORQUAY

Valves have been around for nearly 100 years, with millions upon millions of devices having used them, ranging from radios, TVs, hi-fis, radar equipment, mixing desks, submarines, tanks, warplanes – I could go on. Yet, the only audio amplifiers ever found with standby switches are guitar amplifiers. This, of course, is rather odd in itself *but* it is increasingly becoming the norm, and many guitarists now expect to see them fitted. It's no wonder people are getting confused about them. What do they do? How do they work? Am I using it right?

The true origins of the standby switch are not quite clear, but they first appeared on the mid-50s Fender Bassman, around the same time that Leo Fender e t al were upping the power from 26 to 40-watts. They simply switch the high voltage supply in the amplifier (B+ in the USA, HT – high tension – in the UK) on and off.

Old technical textbooks, military training manuals, and even academic research papers often talk about 'preheating' – allowing the valve to warm up before the high voltage is switched on. They do, however, include a very interesting exception.

The *RCA Transmitting Tubes Technical Manual #4*, p65 states: "Voltage should not be applied to the plates or anodes of vacuum, mercury-vapour, or inert-gas rectifier tubes – except receiving types – until the filaments or cathodes have reached normal operating temperature". The part about Receiving Tubes is interesting because that is what we use in audio devices.

Merlin Blencowe – who literally wrote the book on designing valve amps for guitar and bass – says: "Let's get one thing straight: a standby switch does not extend the life of the valves, it is more likely to reduce their useful life. The valves do not care if you switch on the heaters and HT at the same time.

"If standby switches did have magical life-extending properties then we would expect to see it mentioned from time to time in proper textbooks and valve manuals, yet such discussion is conspicuous by its absence. Indeed, some texts explicitly exclude audio valves from the discussion of similar pre-heating switches (mainly concerning radio transmitters). Despite this, promotional materials glorifying the supposed effects of standby switches are often published (always on the internet and in non-technical magazines, never in real academic work) even by well-known guitar amp manufacturers, presumably with good-but-misguided intentions. So such myths become self-propagating."

If the books and experts say we don't need to preheat the valves, why did Leo put one on his Fender amplifier?

One theory is that it was actually designed as a mute switch, but this quickly falls flat as there are quicker, safer, and better ways to implement that feature, rather than hot-switching 400-or-so volts! Another is that the 5E6 Bassman was the first to use a DC-coupled cathode follower, which are susceptible to grid-cathode arcing if the cathode isn't warmed up – quite rare but it could happen.

My theory comes from a designer's point of view. Having the ability to switch off the high voltage/ high tension is incredibly useful when tweaking a circuit during the R&D phase, but also when diagnosing a faulty amplifier. This practice is quite normal and most of my prototypes will have a HV switch for that reason. I suspect this was the case at Fender, and they decided to leave the switch in situ for the production models.

Of course, we all know Marshall copied the Bassman circuit for their JTM45 and not long after Vox, Gibson, and eventually the others started adding them to their own models. Quite quickly, that simple switch became part of guitar amplifier tradition, much to many designers' dismay.

Do you *need* to use it? No, not at all. Your amplifier will function perfectly fine without it – just leave it in the 'play' position. C*an* you use it? Sure, why not. But use it as the name intends, to place the amplifier in standby for short periods such as unplugging/ plugging in your guitar.

And that's it. Simple.

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1956 Gibson ES-5N Switchmaster Blonde
1959 Gibson ES-355 Mono Stoptail
1960 Gibson ES-345 TDSV Cherry PAF's
1962 Gibson ES-335 TD PAF PAT
1964 Gibson ES-345 TDVC
1956 Gibson ES-175D
1959 Gibson ES-175D Players
1967 Gibson ES-330L Burgundy

1934 Gibson Super 400

1957 Fender Stratocaster Mary Kaye
1959 Fender Stratocaster maple neck
1961 Fender Stratocaster Blonde
1962 Fender Stratocaster Fiesta Red
1963 Fender Stratocaster Olympic White
1969 Fender Stratocaster S/B
1973 Fender Stratocaster LPB
1982 Fender Stratocaster AVRI

1952 Fender Telecaster ex-Lenny Kravitz
1953 Fender Telecaster
1956 Fender Telecaster
1958 Fender Telecaster Custom Prototype CATALOGUE guitar!
1967 Fender Custom Telecaster Candy Apple Red
1968 Fender Telecaster Thinline
1969 Fender Telecaster Sonic Blue

1959 Fender Jazzmaster Blonde
1963 Fender Jaguar Blonde Gold
1966 Fender Jaguar Olympic White

1952 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
1955 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
1968 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
1958 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1960 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1974 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1955 Gibson Les Paul Junior
1959 Gibson Les Paul Junior 3/4
1960 Gibson Les Paul TV Junior
1956 Gibson Les Paul TV Special
1962 Gibson Les Paul SG STD Ebony Block
1963 Gibson Les Paul SG STD
1963 Gibson Korina Flying V White

1966 Fender Jazz Bass Sonic Blue MINT
1953 Fender Precision Bass
1980 Musicman Bass MINT!

1963 Gretsch Tennessean
1972 Dick Knight Custom Twin Neck ex Jon Camp Renaissance
1967 Rickenbacker 360/12 Gold Parts

1964 Epiphone FT110 Frontier
1968 Martin 00-18C

2005 PRS Employees Model Santana 2
2016 PRS DGT Private Stock
2015 Gibson True Historic Ace Frehley
2016 Gibson True Historic R9 Tom Murphy

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1967 Gibson ES-335 TD Pelham Blue

1957 Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster

1952 Fender Telecaster Blackguard

1956 Gibson Les Paul Standard MINT

1969 Gibson Flying V

1964 Fender Stratocaster Olympic White

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Matt Gleason in his West London workshop – "I wanted to develop Monty's into a brand"

INDUSTRY INSIDER

MONTY'S GUITARS

INTERVIEW JOSH GARDNER **PHOTOGRAPHY** JOE SUPPLE

From pickups to pedals, accessories and repairs, Monty's Guitars is dedicated to helping make your guitar sound and play better. We spoke to main man Matt Gleason about the growth and expansion of the London-based boutique brand…

How did you get into guitar in the first place?

"The initial spark was watching *Back To The Future* as a child and being captivated by Marty McFly playing *Johnny B Goode* on a red Gibson ES-345. Then when I was a bit older it was getting into bands like Nirvana, Green Day and Radiohead, loving the sounds they made and wanting to do the same."

When did you first start tinkering with guitars?

"Even as a child I was always a hands-on kind of person, I was always taking things apart and almost always putting them back together again. In terms of guitar it all really began when studying at the Guitar Institute in Acton (now the ICMP) in the year 2000. I had a Mexican Telecaster that always had issues and I would regularly take it to [legendary London repairer and retailer] Charlie Chandler to get it fixed. I would relentlessly pester him for a job and on the day I graduated, I got word that I could start at Chandler Guitars as his apprentice."

What was the moment you realised that you had a viable business on your hands?

"The workshop side has always been busy, but in terms of our pickups, the first big thing was receiving orders from people I had no connection to. When the first one came in I thought it was my mum ordering some pickups using a false identity! It soon became apparent that the Monty's name was getting out there and people were starting to trust me with their tone."

Did you have any outside investors or similar to help you get your business off the ground?

"No, is the simple answer, Monty's has never had any outside investment. When I started, I had a strong customer base from my years at Chandler's. I always say being a repair person is much like being a hairdresser, when you find one you like you stick with them, so I was always busy. But you can only sell your time once, and I wanted to grow Monty's into a brand. I was becoming obsessed with pickups, so to move into this, I sold my motorbike to buy Jason Lollar's pickup book [*Basic Pickup Winding and Complete Guide to Making Your Own Pickup Winder*] and some parts, and locked myself away in a garage and took it from there."

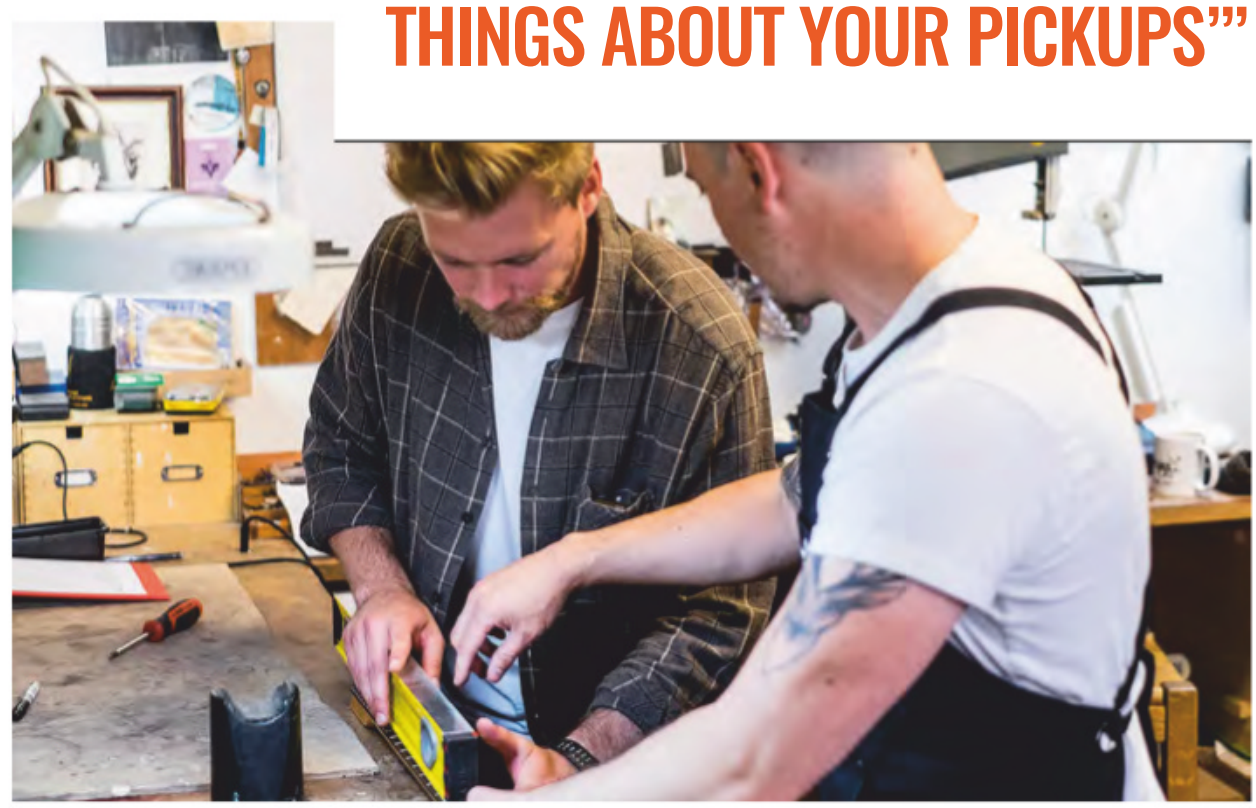
At what point did you feel like you 'nailed' your Monty's branding?

"I always had a strong vision of what I wanted Monty's aesthetic to be, my aim is to fall stylistically somewhere between Victoriana and Art Deco. From the start wanted a certain amount of luxury with our packaging. We take a lot of time and care to handwrite every box and wrap, tie and wax seal each one. We have done this from day one and believe it is very important. The positive feedback from our customers over the years about the packaging has been so rewarding, it really makes me feel like I am doing something right."

How did you come up with your best-selling product?

"Our best selling product is our replica PAF humbucker pickups. Through all the years

“I WAS AT HOME ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON AND GOT A TEXT MESSAGE FROM A NUMBER I DIDN’T RECOGNISE SAYING, ‘MY NAME IS ED O’BRIEN AND I HAVE HEARD REALLY GOOD THINGS ABOUT YOUR PICKUPS’”



of playing and repairing hundreds of vintage PAFs, I really fell in love with a certain kind of PAF that would crop up every now and then; it was bright and dynamic with lots of harmonic content while at the same time being thick and fat sounding. I found no one out there was recreating these. I started to take readings of the PAFs that did what I liked, took them apart looking for their secrets, and down the rabbit hole I fell. I feel I’ve nailed what I was aiming for and the hugely positive response from players truly makes me feel warm and fuzzy inside.”

What’s your proudest moment as a maker to date?

“I would say; making and installing a set of PAFs for Ed O’Brien of Radiohead. I was at home on a Sunday afternoon, and got a text message from a number I didn’t recognise saying, ‘My name is Ed O’Brien and I have heard really good things about your pickups and I would like to buy a set.’ I was convinced it was a prank by (neighbour and friend) Steve Crow from Audio Kitchen, but it turned out he had just passed my number on to Ed and forgot to tell me!”

What do you think are the biggest challenges and opportunities for the guitar industry today?

“One of the biggest challenges is cutting through the noise. 2020 is a great time to be a gearhead, there are a lot of people out there doing really cool things, but because of this it makes it harder as a manufacturer to be heard. At the same time one of the biggest opportunities is the ability with social media to connect directly with your customers and build a real community around your business.”

What’s next for Monty’s Guitars?

“2019 was a very busy year for us – we launched a new website and expanded our pickup range massively with more vintage-accurate models and some wilder stuff. We also unveiled our first-ever signature product, a custom Telecaster set for ‘Danish’ Pete Honoré. We have a huge amount of plans; new pickups, more signature products, and things no one would expect. A big thing at Monty’s is having no regrets, we want to run with every crazy idea we have… and we have a lot of them!”

For more information visit montysguitars.com

PEDALBOARD AMPS

WORDS EVIGAN XIAO

More and more gigging and recording guitarists are choosing to ditch big boxes in favour of something smaller and more portable – the age of the pedalboard amp has arrived, and here are eight of the best…

STRYMON IRIDIUM
£399

1 The Iridium puts three iconic amplifier sounds and nine different impulse response speaker cabinets at your disposal, all from the convenience of your pedalboard. The Room knob also allows you to control the level of natural room ambience and toggle between three room sizes, creating the ideal compact solution for recording guitar players and pedalboard addicts wanting to go direct.

BLUGUITAR AMP1 MERCURY EDITION
£599

2 There was a time when it was hard to imagine a pedalboard-sized amp packing 100 watts of output power, but BluGuitar's AMP1 does just that. Alongside clever onboard Nanotube technology, its features include four independent and fully modifiable channels, a speaker simulation output for recording and three integrated footswitches.

QUILTER TONE BLOCK 201
£440

3 Compared to some compact amps the Tone Block's five fixed analogue amp voicings may seem limited, but the graduated Tri-Q (low, mid and high, all-in-one) and Tone Cut controls allow the user to shape the amp's tone in the finest detail. With a promise of 200 watts of power on tap, you certainly shouldn't be short of headroom, either…

TAURUS STOMP-HEAD 5
$544

5 Taurus's Stomp-Head series of pedalboard amps run a long gamut, ranging from vintage-focused models to hi-gain amplifiers all powered by its Master Tube Design technology. The 90-watt 5 version offers three channels and four distinct amp sounds, plus an onboard noise gate and input boost for maximum versatility.

MILKMAN SOUND THE AMP
£649

6 Despite its unassuming exterior, The Amp boasts 50 watts of power running through a discrete Class A circuit. Designed to replicate the harmonics and high fidelity tones associated with high-end tube amps, Milkman Sound's pedalboard amp also has Robert Keeley-designed onboard reverb and tremolo effects. The Amp also features a 'pedal level' output that allows it to be used at the front end of a pedalboard.

HUGHES & KETTNER BLACK SPIRIT 200 FLOOR
£789

7 The Black Spirit 200 Floor is designed to provide the same sonic experience as its larger Black Spirit 200 head and combo. Combined with its proprietary Spirit technology, the Floor's analogue circuitry creates tube-like tones at 200 watts. The integrated Red Box AE+ speaker emulation means that recording with direct-out sounds is a doddle.

ELECTRO-HARMONIX 44 MAGNUM
£144

4 A true pedalboard amp if there ever was one, the EHX 44 Magnum appropriately packs in 44 watts of clean power into a Nano-sized enclosure. With just a volume control and a bright switch, it's designed to be paired with a preamp pedal to give you on-the-fly tone-shaping options.

VANFLET STATION1
€550

8 Pegged as "the most urban guitar amplifier ever", Vanflet's Station1 aims to provide a consistent tube amp-like experience regardless of location. The 40-watt 12AT7-driven amp is about the size of a lunchbox and comes with an easy-to-understand front panel. Other features include a headphone jack and XLR output.

Forsyth
Est 1857

Highlights Of The Month

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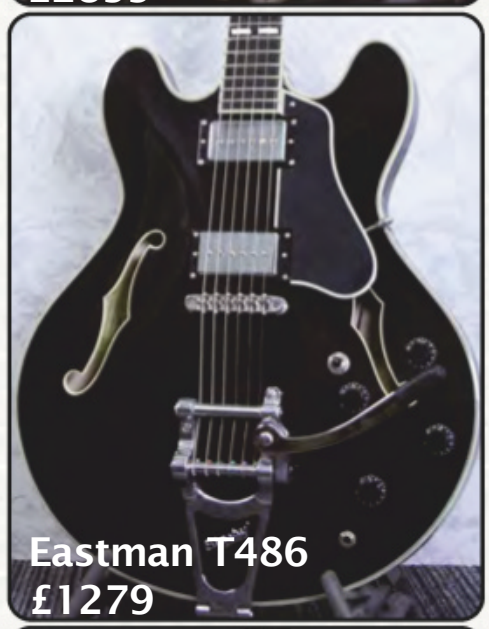
Atkin ASJ
£3499


Eastman T486
£1279

Fender Electric XII
£810

Revelation VX63/12
12 String £359

Burguet Unico
£2995

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Los Angeles

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Fender

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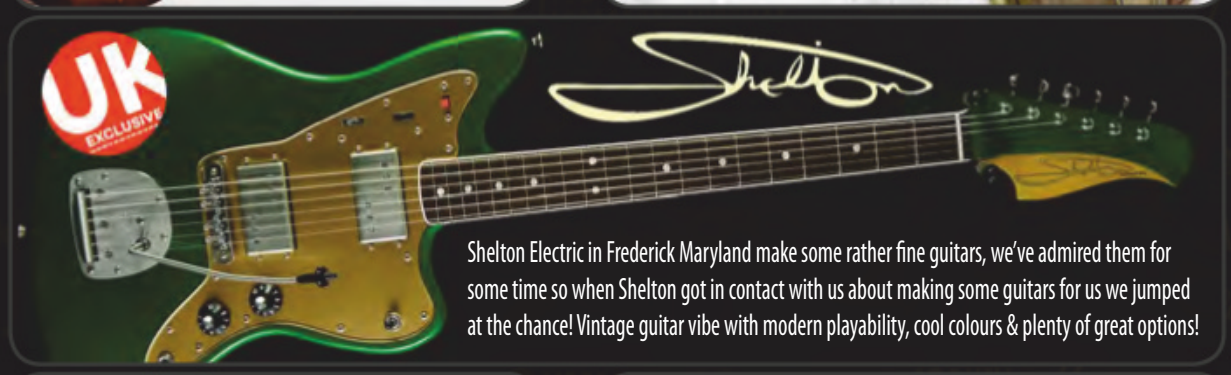

Shelton

Shelton Electric in Frederick Maryland make some rather fine guitars, we've admired them for some time so when Shelton got in contact with us about making some guitars for us we jumped at the chance! Vintage guitar vibe with modern playability, cool colours & plenty of great options!

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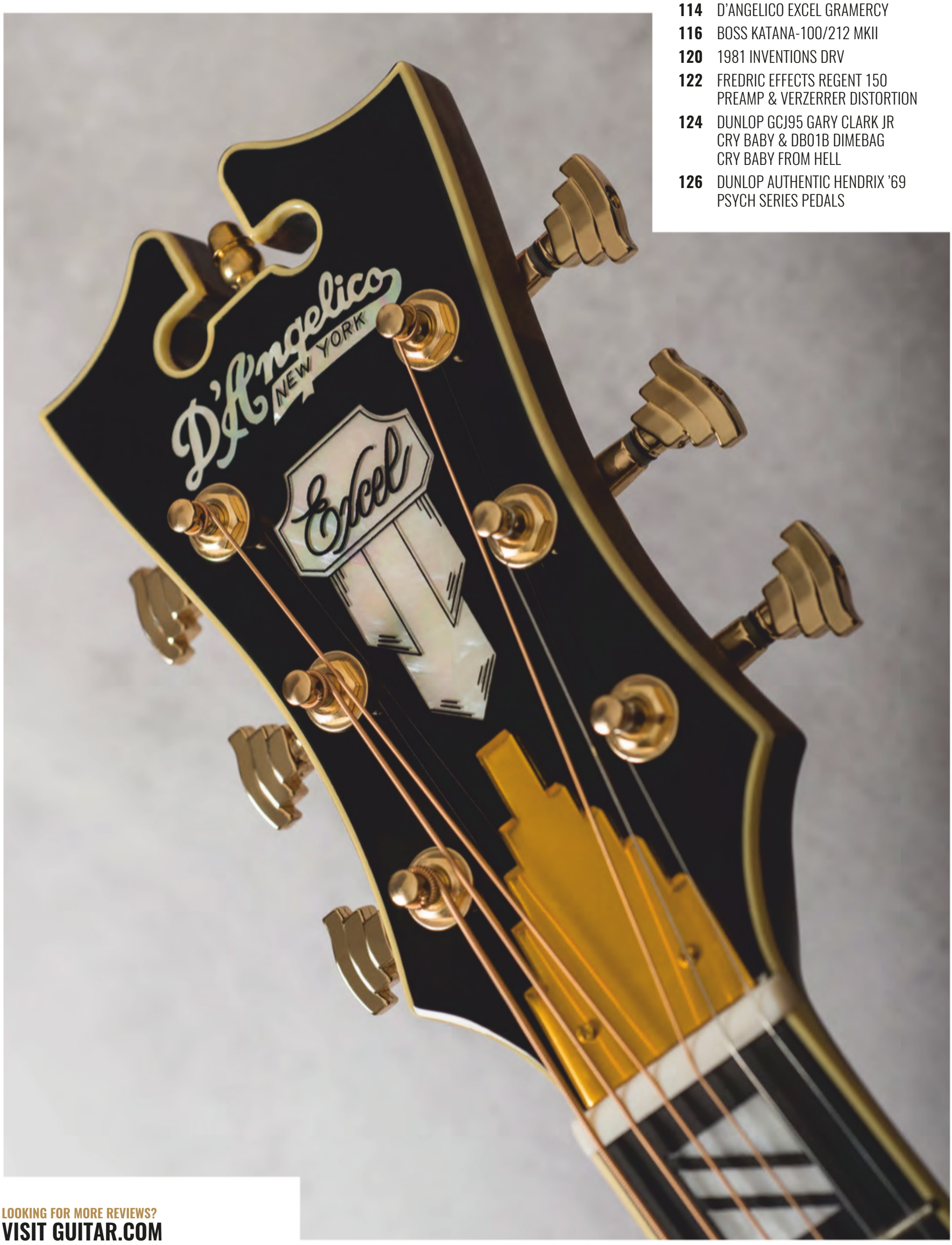

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GRETSCH

BRIAN SETZER SIGNATURE NASHVILLE & STEVE WARINER NASHVILLE GENTLEMAN

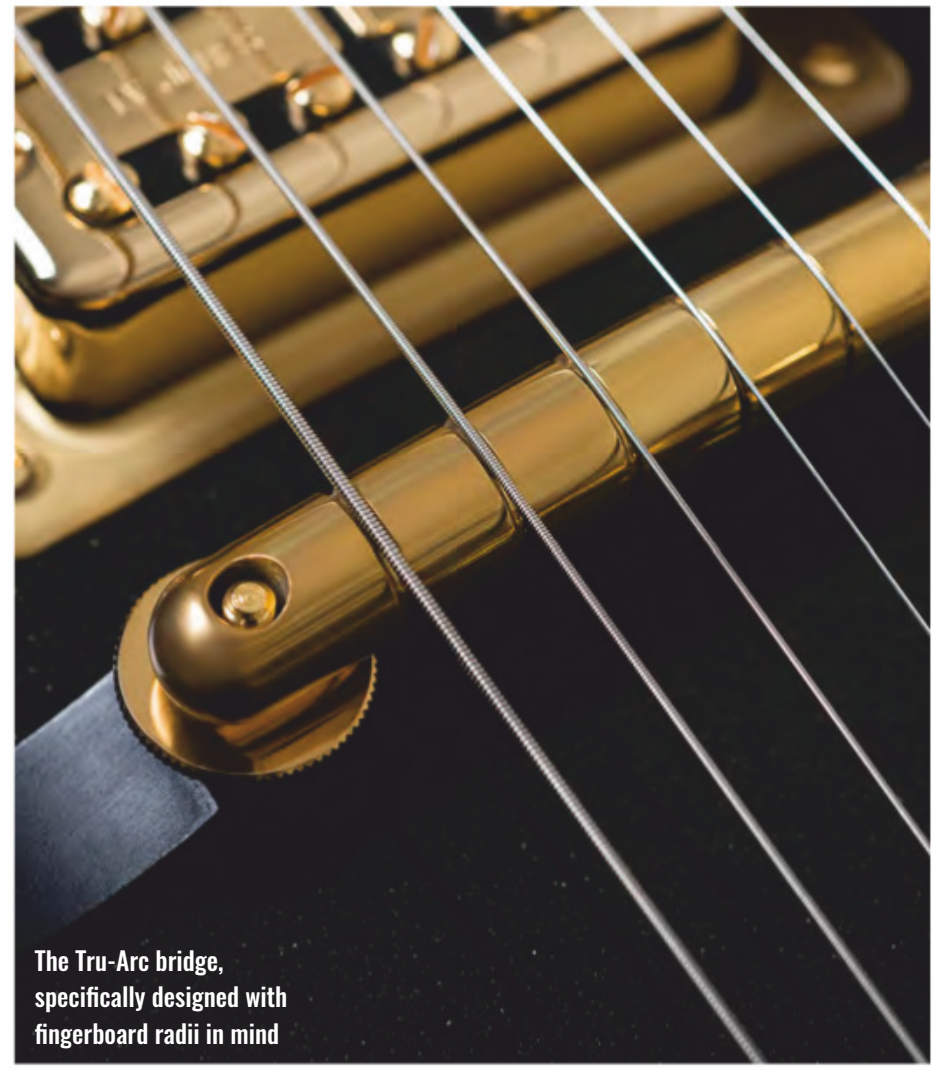
WORDS HUW PRICE

Steve Wariner and Brian Setzer know a thing or two about great Gretsch tone and are two of the company's most high profile artists. Time to give their signature models a spin…

The iconic Gretsch 6120 and Nashville models are closely related. Most associate the 6120 with its single-cutaway incarnation. The last of these was made in 1961, and thereafter the 6120 became a slimmer double-cutaway with faux f-holes. This version was rebranded the 'Chet Atkins Nashville' and in 1966, acquired a fancy brass headstock plate. By then, the only features it shared with the 6120s of the 1950s were the Bigsby and orange lacquer.

In that context, both of these 'Nashvilles' are something of an anomaly, and the Steve Wariner model actually harks back to something a decade earlier. With its Magic Black finish, gold plated hardware, deep 2.75-inch body and painted f-holes, it's similar to the second 6120 that Gretsch made for Chet. He was first seen playing it in the late summer of 1956 and as well as being one of his personal favourites, it was also his preferred guitar for experimentation.

The Duo-Tron pickup is an impressively versatile unit


The Tru-Arc bridge, specifically designed with fingerboard radii in mind

Gold and Magic Black make for a stunning colour combination

KEY FEATURES

G6120T-SW STEVE WARINER SIGNATURE NASHVILLE GENTLEMAN
PRICE £3,339 (inc. hard case)
DESCRIPTION Hollowbody archtop electric guitar, made in Japan
BUILD Laminated maple body with trestle bracing, maple set neck with 'Standard U' profile, 12□ radius ebony fingerboard with pearloid neo-classic inlays, aged white binding with B/W purfling and 22 medium-jumbo frets
HARDWARE String-Thru Bigsby, Tru-Arc brass 'Rocking Bar' bridge with pinned ebony base, Gotoh locking tuners, gold plexi pickguard
ELECTRONICS TV Jones Classic Plus (bridge) & Paul Yandell Duo-Tron (neck), master volume, master tone (push/pull coil split), three-way pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 648mm/25.5"
NECK WIDTH 43.2mm at nut, 53.5mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.5mm at first fret, 23.4mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 35.3mm at nut, 51.9mm at bridge
WEIGHT 7.5lb/3.4kg
FINISH Magic Black gloss nitrocellulose
LEFT-HANDERS No

8/10 **Stunning looks, extended scale length and contrasting pickups make for a contemporary and versatile 6120**

Steve Wariner is a Grand Ole Opry and Kentucky Music Hall of Fame member and one of only five guitar players ever to get a Certified Guitar Player award from Chet Atkins. No doubt he's aware of Chet's early 6120, but that doesn't mean he wanted his signature Nashville Gentleman to be a straight copy. Instead, it sports an intriguing mixture of old and modern features.

Like Chet, Wariner prefers a brass nut so fretted notes sound the same as open strings. Back in 1956, Chet's black 6120 wouldn't have had trestle bracing or a metallic finish, but this guitar has both. The finish is particularly impressive, with gold particles mixed in with the black to match the hardware.

Tim Harmon designed Tru-Arc bridges to match fingerboard radii – in this case 12-inches. As well as vastly improving playability, intonation accuracy benefits, too. Here it's fitted on an ebony base that's pinned to the top for stability. Although Wariner has specified a stripped down

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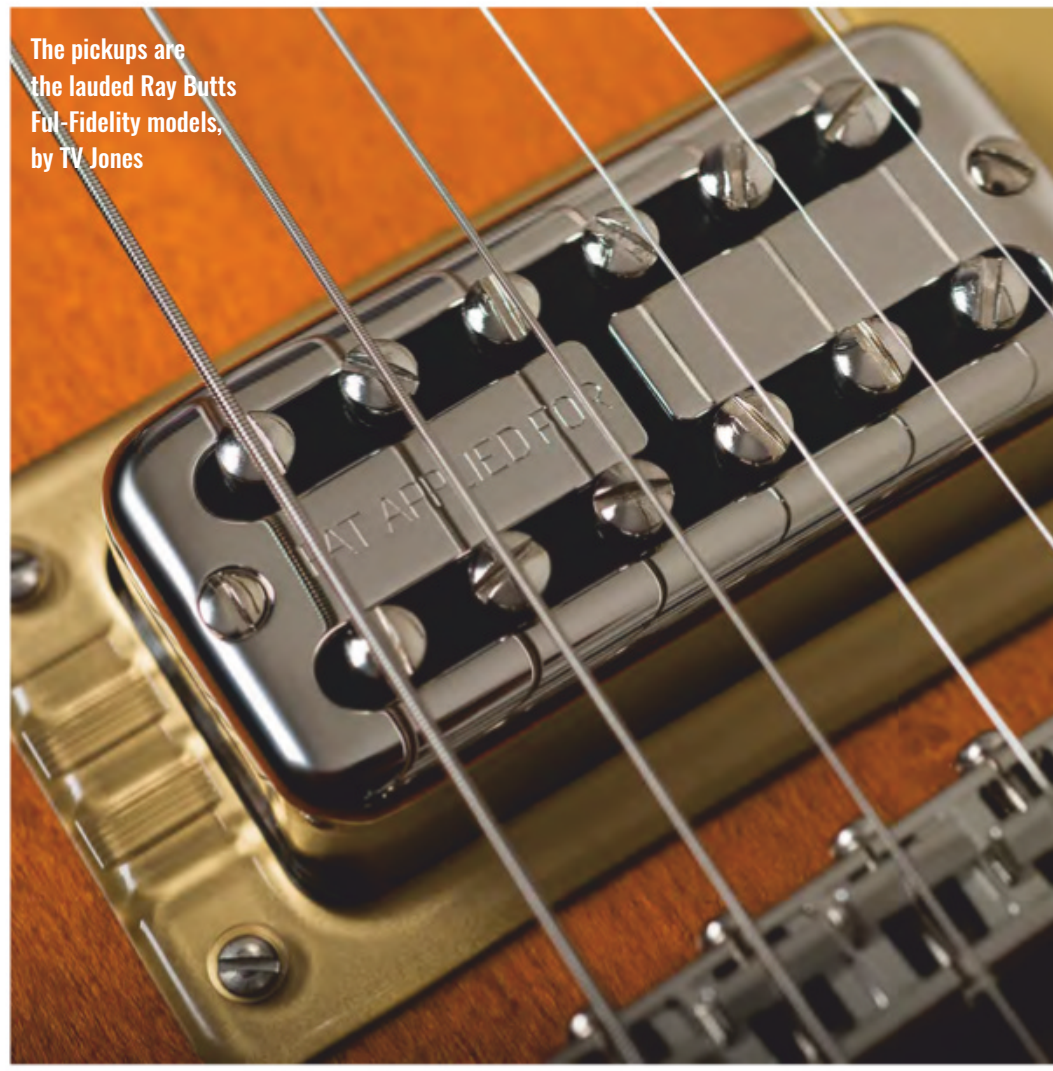
The Setzer signtaure features locking Gotoh tuners



The pickups are the lauded Ray Butts Ful-Fidelity models, by TV Jones

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

KEY FEATURES

G6120T-BSSMK BRIAN SETZER SIGNATURE NASHVILLE '59 'SMOKE'
PRICE £3,199 (inc. hard case)
DESCRIPTION Hollowbody archtop electric guitar, made in Japan
BUILD Laminated maple body with trestle bracing, maple set neck with 'Vintage V' profile, 9.5-12□ compound radius ebony fingerboard with pearloid neo-classic inlays, aged white binding with black purfling and 22 frets
HARDWARE Bigsby B6CGH, Adjusto-Matic bridge with pinned rosewood base, Gotoh locking tuners, gold plexi pickguard
ELECTRONICS 2x TV Jones Ray Butts Ful-Fidelity pickups, master volume, individual pickup volumes, 3-way tone switch, 3-way pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 625mm/24.6"
NECK WIDTH 42.9mm at nut, 52.8mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.5mm at first fret, 23.3mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 35.3mm at nut, 51.9mm at bridge
WEIGHT 7.5lb/3.4kg
FINISH Smoke Orange semi-gloss lacquer
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT gretschguitars.com

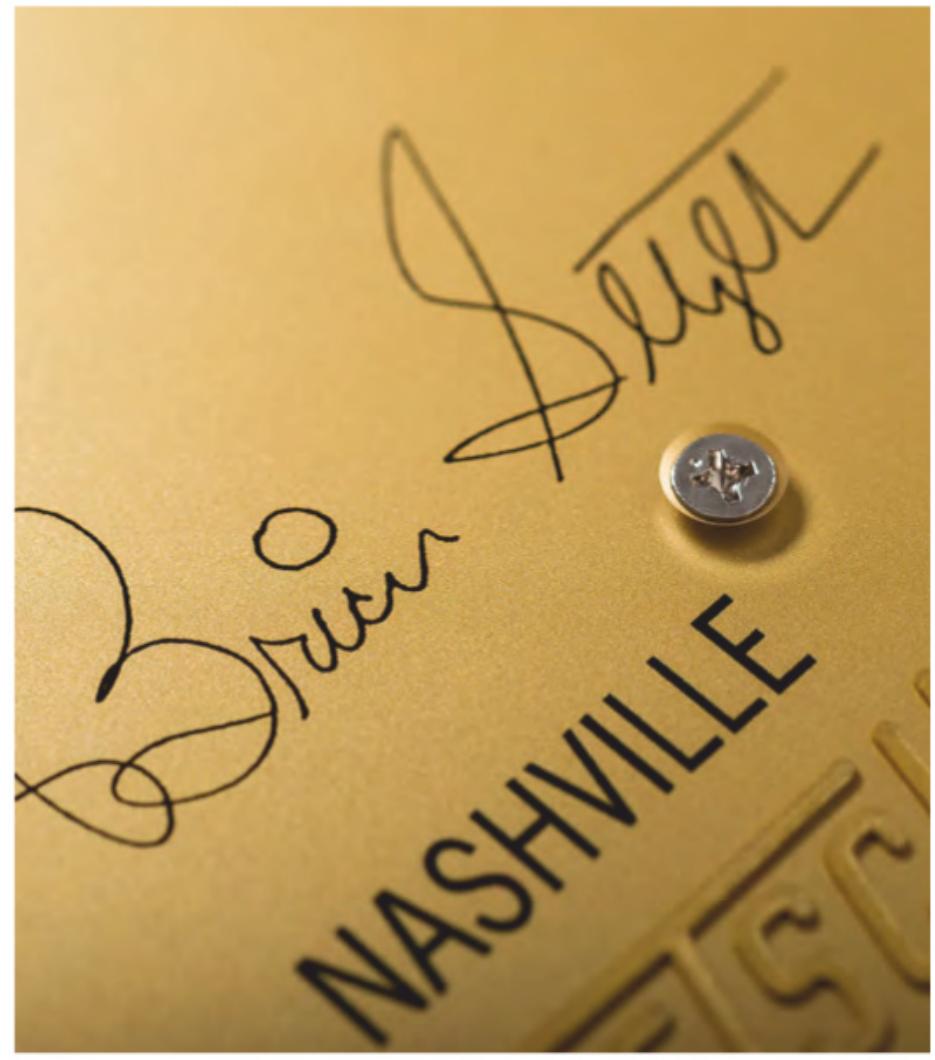
9/10 **Convincing vintage vibes coupled with great pickups, sophisticated refinements and a fantastic neck**

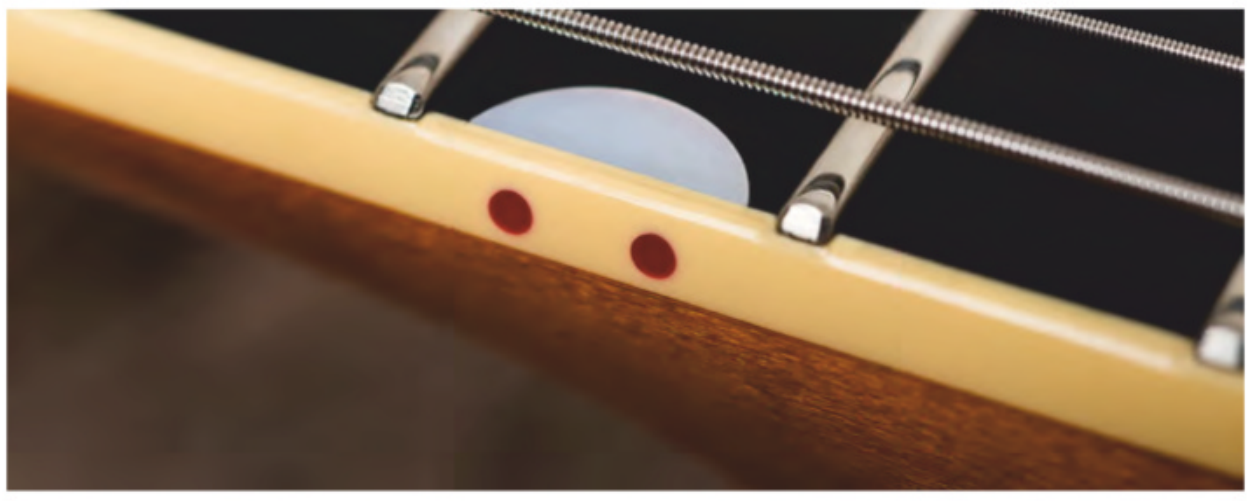
'hot rod' configuration with master volume and tone, the tone knob is also a push/pull switch for single-coil mode. That's because Wariner loves Teles, too – and it's also the reason his Gretsch guitar has a 25.5-inch scale length.

Normally we feel apprehensive about low output humbuckers operating half cocked, but having a beefed-up TV Jones Classic Plus in the bridge and a Duo-Tron in the neck is more promising than regular Filter'Trons. For a busy pro such as Wariner, practicality is the name of the game and refinements elsewhere include a String-Thru Bigsby and Gotoh locking tuners.

It's a similar, although more familiar, story with the Setzer model. Like many top players, Brian Setzer has been obliged to figure out how to make his vintage Gretsches viable and robust gigging guitars. Collectors usually prefer to keep guitars original, but if you want to use them for two hours every night on a six month tour, you'll want them to play as nicely

Wariner opts for a String-Thru Bigsby tailpiece for easier string changes





as possible *and* stay in tune! This guitar is based on a 1959 6120 that has been a stage and studio favourite of Setzer's since the 90s and it features the refinements that Setzer and his techs have developed over the years. At first it was nicknamed Smokin' because of its killer tone, but that eventually evolved into 'Smoke'.

TV Jones has done a tonne of work on Smoke, and the bound ebony fingerboard is shaped to a compound radius – 9.5 to 12-inches. Medium-jumbo frets are also installed here, although not the stainless steel 6105 wire that Setzer uses.

Jones also re-veneered the headstock to conceal some ill-advised tuner swaps, and shifted it downwards to tidy up the area behind the nut because Setzer prefers a regular nut to the zero fret Gretsch used during 1959. Consequently, the logo is closer than usual to the tuners, and this guitar has the same look.

Setzer also favours a tune-o-matic bridge – here an Adjusto-Matic mounted on a pinned rosewood base – along with a regular V-cut Bigsby. The control layout is stock 6120 – complete with tone switch – but the pickups may surprise some. TV Jones' Setzer Signature pickups were regarded as the most vintage-accurate Filter'Trons available – until Tom's Ray Butts Ful-Fidelity units assumed that mantle. We're very excited to try them here.

Vintage correct features include flamed maple rims and a dulled Smoke Orange finish that looks wonderful. There's trestle bracing, too, and the body depth is 2.5-inches, but the tuners are locking Gotohs rather than the Sperzels more usually found on Setzer's vintage Gretsches.

IN USE

There's little point in comparing the unplugged tones because the closed f-holes make the Wariner so much mellower and quieter, although both guitars display impressive natural resonance and sustain. The necks feel quite different, too, with the Wariner's 'Standard U' being exactly as described and the Setzer's 'Vintage V' being so subtle it's barely noticeable. That said, it feels sublimely comfortable and uncannily like our own 1960 Anniversary/6120 conversion.

The Setzer's Ray Butts Ful-Fidelity pickups have a distinctly vintage tone. The bridge is bright, quacky and has real bite. The neck is rounder and fuller, but steers well clear of muddiness. They sound a touch thinner and brighter than the vintage Filter'Trons in our Anniversary, but perhaps closer to the slightly squeaky twang and snarl we associate with Setzer's tone. The Setzer model also sustains far more like a solidbody and we're pleased that having made the much derided mud switch usable, Gretsch has stuck with it.

The Wariner's TV Classic Plus is gutsier and fatter than the Ray Butts units. It retains a Filter'Tron type tone, but it's more contemporary, aggressive and less niche. The Duo-Tron is something special because the blades give the plain strings extra heft and solidity. It's remarkably well balanced and powerful but not overblown. It also performs more convincingly in single-coil mode than the Classic Plus, but neither split-coil sound is much like a Telecaster.

The Wariner Nashville Gentleman has amazing looks, greater versatility, and many will prefer the longer scale length. It could be a bit of a handful, but the Setzer is addictively playable and is among the best vintage inspired 6120 variants we have played. Some might prefer it even more with a Tru-Arc and a set of Grover Sta-Tites, but we're not moaning.

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Sterling

The Sterling-branded vibrato is highly impressive

STERLING BY MUSIC MAN
LK100 LUKE

WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

The latest, affordable version of Steve Lukather's Music Man Luke III signature model offers a taste of luxury rarely seen at this price point…

Seven years ago, Music Man released the Luke III, with a more affordable Sterling-branded version of the sleek Steve Lukather signature model arriving in 2014 in the shape of the LK100D. It's now a long-running success as a signature, and the latest version of this reliable model featured here drops the 'D' from its moniker and swaps DiMarzio Transition pickups for Sterling's own Music Man-designed humbuckers, while the neck material is upgraded from plain ol' maple to the roasted variety.

With a striking flame maple veneer and classy Blueberry Burst finish, the aesthetics certainly belie the price point, as does the V-shaped neck profile. We were initially a little taken aback to encounter such a pronounced V on a relatively slim neck, but 10 minutes in we're smitten – it's both supportive and effortlessly comfortable, with a silky feel.

IN USE

If you think own-brand pickups must be a sonic downgrade on the previous DiMarzios, we strongly advise plugging in and leaving your preconceptions at the door. In fact, the pickups are very much the star of the show, with seemingly boundless versatility.

Running the Sterling through a Bogner Ecstasy patch on our Axe-Fx III, the output from the passive pickups is not as liquid-hot as you might expect from a signature artist that was once exclusively associated with active EMG units. The bridge pickup offers plenty of bite and power, while the neck humbucker is ultra creamy.

Some will bemoan the paucity of high-end sparkle in this position, but our temptation to tweak the amp to restore it subsides as we acclimatise to the sound, and begin rolling off the volume a little. This is precisely when the LK100 begins to reveal just how characterful it is, and part of the joy of the playing experience is digging in for those fusion-tinged Lukather style licks.

Another nice feature is the active boost, introduced via the push/push volume pot. It's certainly not a transparent clean boost – we detect a little gain added to the tone – but nonetheless it's an eminently usable feature, providing a near-perfect sonic spike for the switch between rhythm and lead.

The whammy bar is very important to Lukather's playing, as his wonderful faux-slide licks prove. The Sterling-branded vibrato unit copes with anything we throw at it and is seriously expressive. We find our right hand is positively glued to it, scooping into notes and even using it in place of finger-vibrato – something we rarely use a vibrato arm for. And despite all this whammy use and abuse, there's no need to keep reaching for the tuners; everything is nicely stable and tuning is rock-solid.

Sometimes a new piece of gear will give you the platform to express yourself, and sometimes it can encourage you to explore new aspects of playing – impressively, the Sterling Luke falls into both categories. G

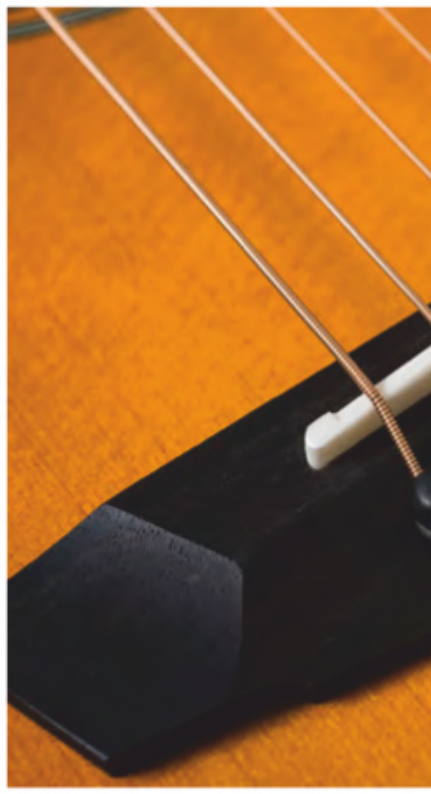
KEY FEATURES

PRICE £859 (including gigbag)
DESCRIPTION Double-cutaway solidbody electric guitar, made in Indonesia
BUILD Basswood body, flame maple veneer top, roasted hard maple bolt-on neck, 12-inch radius rosewood fretboard, 24 narrow frets, dual-action truss rod
HARDWARE 6-saddle Sterling 'Vintage Tremolo' vibrato bridge, locking tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Music Man-designed humbuckers, push/push volume (activates 12dB boost), tone, 5-way blade pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 25.5□/648mm
NECK DEPTH 20.6mm at 1st fret, 26.7mm at 12th fret
NECK WIDTH 41.9 mm at nut, 51.7 mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 54mm at bridge, 36.4mm at nut
WEIGHT 3.3kg/7.3lb
FINISH Blueberry Burst (as reviewed), Hazel Burst, Luke Blue
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT stringsandthings.co.uk, sterlingbymusicman.com

9/10 **Stunning sounds, excellent build and wonderful playability make the LK100 a must-try, especially at this price**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

PRS 35th Anniversary SE Custom 24 **£899**, Chapman ML1 CAP10 **£599**, Reverend Double Agent OG **£729**



D'ANGELICO
EXCEL GRAMERCY

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

An upgraded take on D'Angelico's popular grand auditorium model brings archtop pedigree to the acoustic guitar world

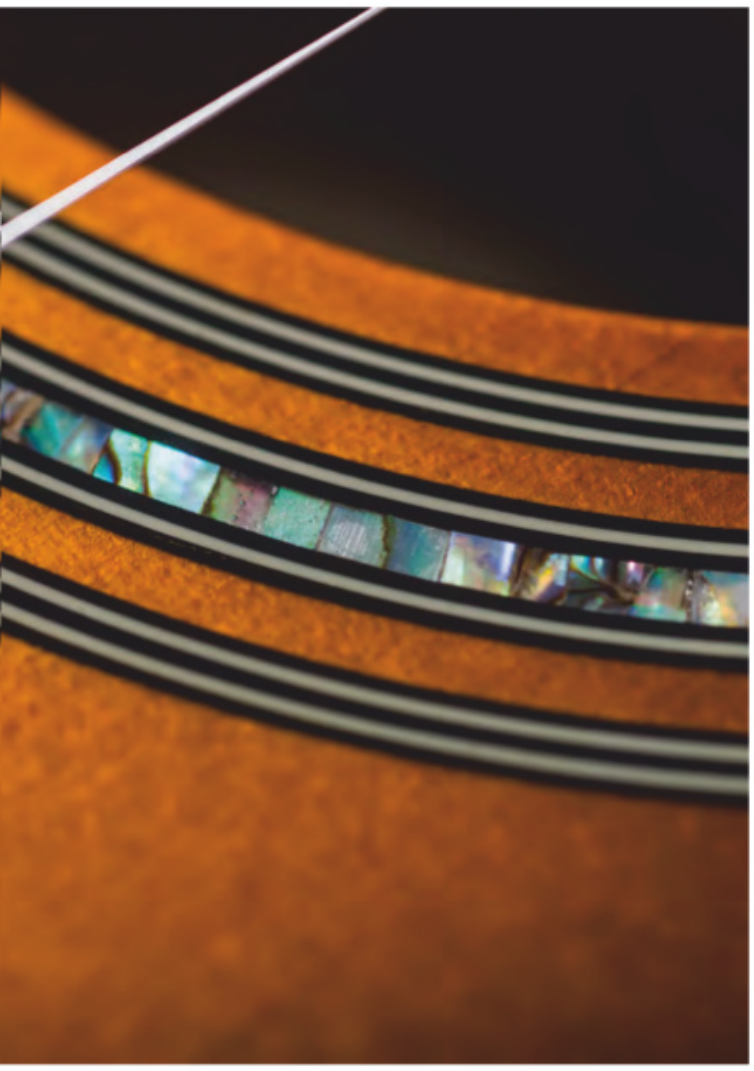
Rising like a flat-top phoenix from the ashes of a venerable 1930s archtop brand, D'Angelico's acoustic guitar line was first launched in 2015 and has proved so popular that it now accounts for nearly half of the company's worldwide sales.

Now upgraded is the Excel Gramercy, D'Angelico's elegant take on the grand auditorium design. Optically, this is not a demure guitar. The headstock remains true to the original D'Angelico aesthetic, but by the stoic standards of traditional acoustic guitar design, it's alarmingly ornate. It does grow on you, though, despite the culture clash of New York Art Deco and Pennsylvanian functionality.

The Excel Gramercy features a solid Sitka spruce top with scalloped X-bracing, while the back and sides are laminated Macassar ebony. This is an increasingly popular wood choice which effectively bypasses any issues with the export of endangered species. It also looks damn good, with beautiful orange/black figuring which nicely complements the Vintage Sunburst finish.

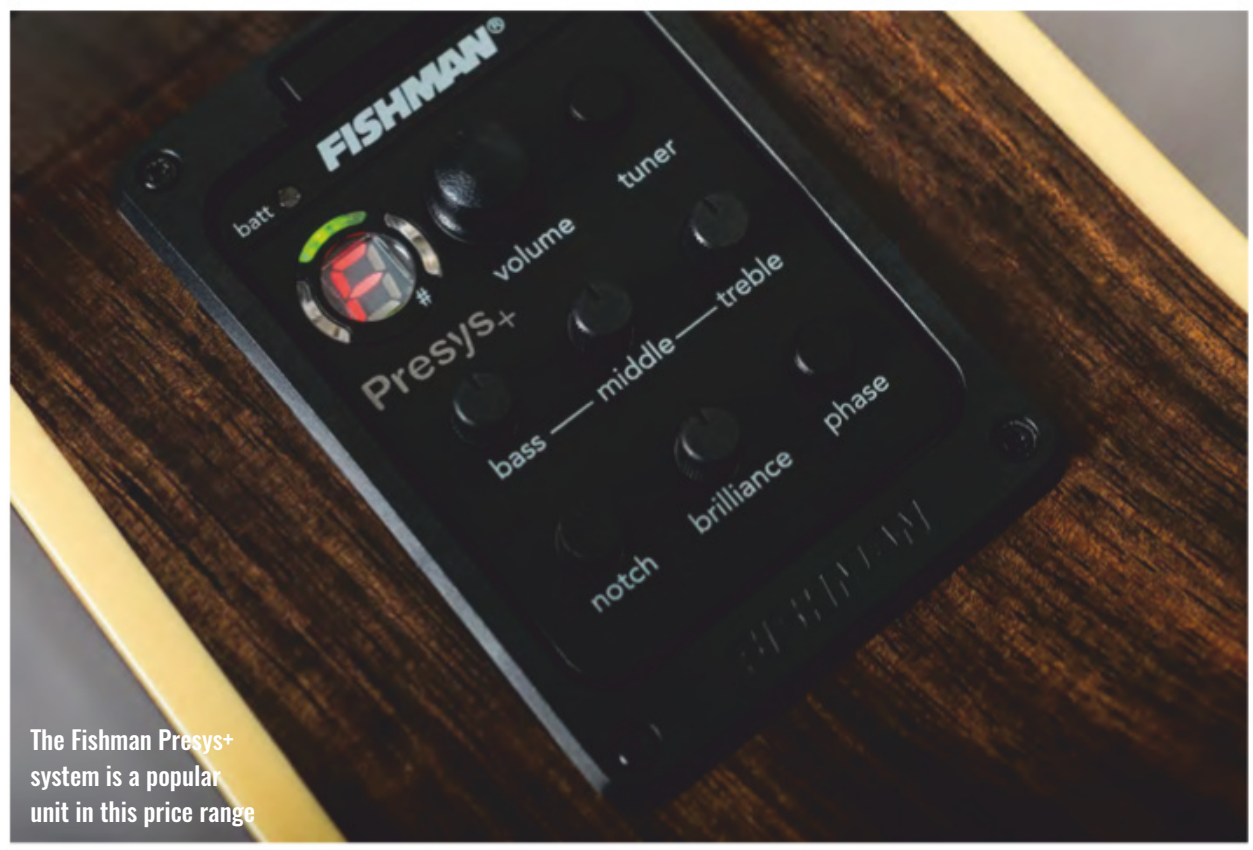
Based around a 25-inch scale length – which is becoming an accepted sweet spot choice between the Gibson and Martin benchmarks – and with a 16-inch lower bout, 4.74-inch body depth and Venetian cutaway, the Gramercy is light in weight, comfortable and well balanced.

D'Angelico describes the 14-fret mahogany neck as a slim C carve and it does feel comfortable and fast. The ebony fingerboard looks and feels good, too; however the playability is let down by some slightly sharp fretwork and the split-block



D'Angelico use classic ebony and bone for bridge and saddles

The ostentatious headstock adds plenty of character



The Fishman Presys+ system is a popular unit in this price range

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £719 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string grand auditorium electro-acoustic guitar, made in Korea
BUILD Solid Sitka spruce top, laminated Macassar ebony back and sides, scarf-jointed mahogany neck, ebony fretboard, cream plastic bindings, ebony bridge, bone nut and saddle, dual action truss-rod
SCALE LENGTH 635mm/25"
NECK WIDTH 42mm at nut, 54mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20mm at first fret, 22mm at 7th fret
STRING SPACING 35mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.7kg/5.6lb
ELECTRONICS Fishman Presys+ active pickup and preamp system
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Full gloss available in Auburn, Vintage Natural, and Vintage Sunburst (as reviewed)
CONTACT dangelicoguitars.com

acrylic pearl fretboard inlays have quite a lot of unsightly filler in some cases. The kerfing and bracing work inside the guitar is also a little haphazard, with some glue blobs and rough patches clearly visible.

It's nothing you couldn't find on a 1930s Kalamazoo, though.

The Excel Gramercy arrives stage-ready with a Fishman Presys+ active pickup and preamp system – it's a popular choice for guitars in this price bracket and features a dependable EQ, in-built tuner and notch, balance and phase knobs in a shoulder-mounted control panel.

IN USE

The first strummed chords on the Excel Gramercy reveal a springy voice that is typical of Macassar ebony. It's a lively, modern sound, bright but with a strong fundamental character, rather than a huge amount of overtones. The response is pretty quick, with the scalloped bracing no doubt playing a part. The dynamic range, typical for a Grand Auditorium, goes from whisper-quiet to muscular strumming without being overpowering.

Moving to a fingerpicking singer/songwriter approach brings out a gentle, expressive character that works well with vocals. The guitar's propensity towards high end shimmer makes it a good choice for modern fingerstyle playing, especially when we drop it into DADGAD, where it remains clear and articulate throughout. Close chord voicings, tapping, slapped harmonics and other extended techniques all work remarkably well.

Art Deco stylings aside, from the nut down, the Excel Gramercy could easily have run the risk of being another generic Pacific Rim GA. However, the exotic choice of woods and open, scalloped braced voice help it stand out almost as much as its ostentatious headstock.

8/10 **Bold aesthetics and exotic woods make for a great stage grand auditorium model**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Alvarez AG60CEAR **£529**, Taylor 114ce **£949**, Furch Blue Plus Gc-CM **£930**

BOSS
KATANA-100/212 MKII

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Two speakers, 10 amp models, 60 effects, 100 watts – do the numbers add up for the flagship combo of the Boss Katana MkII digital amplifier line?

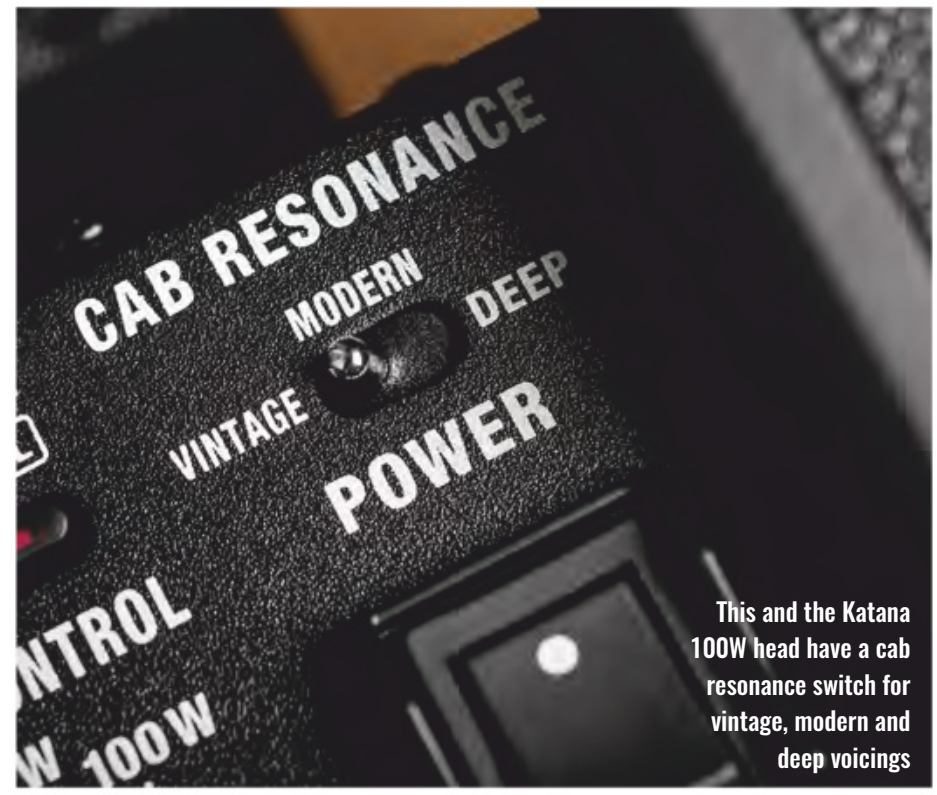
There are probably more Boss stompboxes on the planet right now than there are ants, but maybe it's time to stop thinking of the legendary Japanese brand as just a pedal peddler. Its original Katana amps won over a lot of digi-sceptics – and the MkII range, led by this 2x12 beast, looks set to push things on again.

While we weren't wowed by absolutely every aspect of the Katana-50 MkII combo (see issue 376), there's no denying it sounds a lot like a real valve amp. Or, to be precise, *10* real valve amps. So how about a 100-watt version, combining the 50-watter's tonal chops and multiple effects with enhanced footswitching functionality to create a genuine all-in-one gigging solution?

The Katana-100 is available in three formats: the 2x12 combo on review here, a 1x12 version, and a head that's secretly a bit of a combo too, thanks to a built-in five-inch speaker for home practice.

The extra width of this model means there's room for a bigger control panel, but Boss hasn't exactly gone to town with it. Yes, we get four separate buttons for the presets instead of two doubling up, but the five effects aren't allowed the luxury of one whole control each: booster/mod and FX/delay are still paired up concentrically, which can make things a touch more fiddly then they really ought to be. At least you can now run all five at once, where the original MkI Katanas restricted you to three.

One feature shared by this model and the 100-watt head is the three-way cab resonance



This and the Katana 100W head have a cab resonance switch for vintage, modern and deep voicings

The rotary controls are as nicely intuitive as those on a 'traditional' combo

switch, letting you select 'vintage', 'modern' or 'deep' voicing for the two Katana-branded speakers and the DI/headphone output. This function is also available on the cheaper amps in the range, but not directly from the control panel – only through the Boss Tone Studio desktop software.

Speaking of which… you'll need to supply your own USB Type B cable, but once it's linked up – and you've got the driver working on your PC or Mac – Tone Studio will let you load up and edit a huge range of preset sounds and effects. And when you've created the virtual rig and/or pedalboard of your dreams and stored it in the amp, the optional GA-FC footswitch (available for around £75) allows you to flip between presets or simply turn individual effects on or off.

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £439
DESCRIPTION Digital modelling combo with 10 amp models and five effects, made in Malaysia
POWER RATING 100W
CONTROL PANEL Guitar input; five-way amp type selector with variation button, gain, volume; bass, middle, treble; booster, mod, FX, delay and reverb controls with variation buttons and tap tempo; master volume, output power (100W, 50W, 0.5W, standby), preset buttons (four plus bypass), three-way cab resonance switch, power switch
REAR PANEL Effects loop send and return, stereo expand on/off switch, line output, power amp input, USB Type B, stereo aux input, GA-FC footswitch and expression pedal inputs, recording/ headphones output
SPEAKERS 2x12"
DIMENSIONS 670 x 484 x 248mm
WEIGHT 19.8kg/43.11lb
CONTACT boss.info

IN USE

If your reference point for 2x12 combos is a Fender Twin Reverb or Marshall Bluesbreaker, you'll find this a refreshingly un-hospitalising amp to pick up one-handed – although it's still almost twice the weight of the single-speaker Katana-50 MkII. Like that amp, it's made in Malaysia using fibreboard construction and feels solid enough, if not exactly ultra-robust.

Of course, 100 solid-state watts aren't going to be anywhere near as loud as the valve equivalent, but that's still more than enough for today's stages. In fact, while we're impressed by the sheer power of this thing in 100-watt mode, it's good news for the tinnitus (and the neighbours) that its output can easily be switched down to 50-watts or even a bedsit-friendly 0.5-watt.

At all output settings, the sound scores highly for clarity and 'bigness'. Single-coils through either of the two clean models remain totally pristine most of the way around the gain control, and when the breakup does come, it's free of digital harshness.

The GA-FC footswitch is an optional (£75) extra but highly impressive for switching voices

The rear panel boasts excellent interconnectivity, including an effects loop and USB for the Boss Tone Studio desktop software

The 12-inch speakers are Boss's own Katana-branded units

Switching to 'crunch' brings a major leap in aggression, much like hopping from a blackface amp to a Plexi. But as with the 50-watt model, it's in the four high-gain modes that this amp really cranks up the fun factor – especially when we start adding delay, reverb and modulation to the mix. Get carried away here and things can easily spiral off down a 1980s soft-metal plughole, but the factory-loaded effects are reliably 'Boss' in terms of audio quality.

Grabbing a USB cable, we now connect our amp to the Tone Studio software and really open up our options. There are libraries of preset sounds available, but you shouldn't need to cheat with those – basic amplifier tones are easily dialled up on the Katana's top panel, and navigating the effects on screen is every bit as intuitive.

If you're a fan of Boss's stompboxes, you'll find everything you need here; and with the freedom of up to five effects available at once, it takes just a few minutes to conjure up four drastically different sounds and save them into the amp (with a fifth available in manual 'panel' mode).

This is where that GA-FC footswitch really comes in handy. Five of its six switches mirror the channel buttons on the amp's control panel, but the sixth is every bit as vital. It lets you flip between preset and effects modes – that is, whether you're hopping between whole sounds or turning individual 'pedals' on and off. After two minutes of tap-dancing worthy of the late Brucie himself, we're enamoured – and bemused that this game-changing accessory isn't compatible with the 50W model.

The Katana-100/212 MkII isn't the kind of rugged combo that we'd be happy to hoik into the back of a Transit van for a month-long tour of Uzbekistan – and, let's be realistic, sound-wise it's not going to tear anyone away from their favourite handwired classic – but there's no doubt Boss has nailed the basics that most of us would want here. It's a solid-sounding combo and a versatile pedalboard rolled into one, and it could be all the backline some players will ever need.

8/10 **The big daddy of the new Katana line is loud and proud**

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Line 6 Firehawk 1500 **£779**, Blackstar Silverline Stereo Deluxe **£749**, Marshall Code 100C **£289**

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1981 INVENTIONS
DRV

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

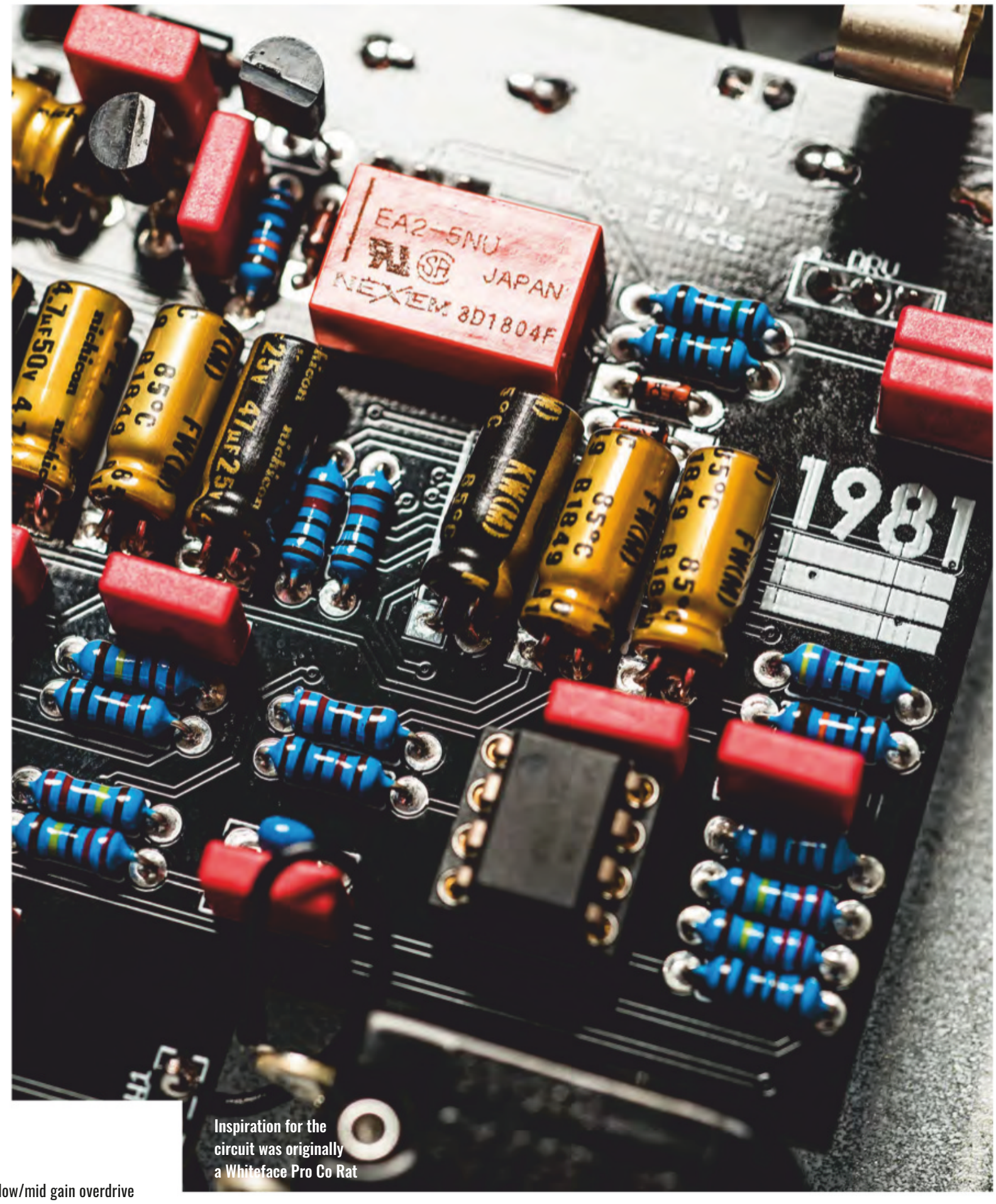
Perhaps the most hyped and drooled-over pedal of 2019 – but there's more to this Instagram darling than meets the eye…

It's a tale as old as time, a tone-obsessed guitarist – frustrated by the capabilities and quality of existing units on the market – begins a quest for new horizons of sonic excellence.

1981 Inventions' Matthew Hoopes was one such guitarist and after four years of intensive R&D, working with his close friend Jon Ashley of Bondi Effects, he launched the first run of 1981 Inventions DRV overdrive pedals late one night in 2018. By morning they had all sold. The fact that the pedal is still only available direct from 1981 Inventions only adds to the mystique, with the pedal only appearing in limited-run drops, often in one-off finish options, usually selling out in hours.

We have to begin by addressing the DRV's aesthetics. There's no getting around it, it's a gorgeous looking box in vaporwave, blacked out, pink, solid silver or any other of the myriad colourways offered over the last year. Here, however, we have what Hoopes has decided will be the 'standard' DRV finish – white in all its negative-space, Bauhaus glory. There are three control knobs (labelled DVR, CUT and VOL) plus an on/off footswitch and corresponding LED. Simple stuff.

The initial jumping-off point for the DRV was a 1985 Whiteface ProCo RAT with the inclusion of a fixed level preamp and around 1/20th the amount of gain to be found in a traditional RAT circuit. The low end, midrange, filter sweep, level, switching system and LED have all been carefully revised to create a pedal that aims to bring new levels of overdrive quality and nuance to your sound.



Inspiration for the circuit was originally a Whiteface Pro Co Rat

KEY FEATURES

PRICE $250
DESCRIPTION Handwired low/mid gain overdrive pedal, made in the USA
CONTROLS DRV, CUT and VOL knobs, on/off footswitch
FEATURES Power indicator LED
DIMENSIONS 86 x 107.5 x 46mm
CONTACT 1981inventions.com

IN USE

Plugging straight into an early Cornford amp with a Tele and everything set straight up, we are rewarded with an instant and frankly superb helping of rich, musical overdrive reminiscent of an original Crowther Hotcake, but with a more elegant voice across the low-mids and bass. There's an almost amp-like response across all pickup settings with picking dynamics and complex chord voicings coming through untrammelled.

It's a touch spiky on the bridge at first, but the cut control is exceptionally powerful, offering a wide spectrum of usable tones from Vox-like chime at the top end to a solid grunt as you cut the trebles. Particularly inspiring is the way the controls interact with one another, the volume and drive offer a large amount of tweakability from an extremely pleasing clean boost to a throaty overdriven roar that never disappears into mush.

Moving across to PAFs on an SG, we discover another layer of pupil-dilating belligerence with the bridge pickup especially loving life with a newfound intensity. The response is immediate, and the decay of each note is consistently musical and organic. In fact, no matter what we plug into it, the DRV retains the character of the guitar and the quality of the overdrive in equal measure. Particularly impressive is the way the pedal works across musical genres with very little need for adjustment.

It takes an exceptional sounding pedal to stand out in today's extremely crowded and noisy marketplace. In the 1981 Inventions DRV, Matthew Hoopes and Jon Ashley have created exactly that. **G**

10/10 **Believe the online hype – this is one of the best overdrive units we've ever heard**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Vemuram Jan Ray **£339**, Crowther Hotcake **£175**, JAM Pedals Limited Edition Rattler **£339**

FREDRIC EFFECTS

REGENT 150 PREAMP & VERZERRER DISTORTION

RICHARD PURVIS

These two British-made pedals have both been designed in tribute to obscure kit from the old Eastern Bloc… but the results could hardly be more different

East Germany used to be famous for Brecht, the Stasi and a lot of heavily juiced shot-putters. But repressive regimes need musical equipment too, so what better place for an indie pedal maker such as Fredric Effects to look for some left-field inspiration?

The Regent 150 Preamp is based on the front end of the Vermona Regent 150K, an amp from the 70s that almost certainly never made it over the Berlin Wall, while the Verzerrer is an update of 'East Germany's only distortion effect', the Bohm Trickverzerrer. This should be interesting.

There's a nice picture of one of those Vermona amps on the Fredric Effects website. By crikey it's no looker, but you can see how lovingly the Regent 150 pedal has been modelled on the oh-so-dated styling of its inspiration. Fredric main man Tim Webster says he went into this project expecting the result to be a lo-fi oddity, but ended up with an unexpectedly musical tone-improver.

That's not quite the idea with the Verzerrer, which aims to faithfully recreate the primitive Bohm device but with modernised controls (the original required a screwdriver). It does, however, have six added dip-switches on the circuit board for assorted noise-reducing and volume-boosting functions. This one's housed in a wedge-shaped enclosure reminiscent of the

These UK-made Fredric pedals are based on obscure 1970s East German tech

The Verzerrer is a simple proposition – some of the tones here are sheer nastiness

The Regent 150 Preamp looks like an oddity but is heaps of versatile fun

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

KEY FEATURES

REGENT 150 PREAMP
PRICE £120
DESCRIPTION Preamp and EQ pedal, made in UK
CONTROLS Bass, treble, volume
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-volt battery or mains supply (not included)
DIMENSIONS 109 x 68 x 49mm
CONTACT fredric.co.uk

9/10 **At least three pedals in one, all of them superb**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Hudson Electronics Broadcast **£155**, Ground Control Audio Tsukuyomi **£159**, ThorpyFX Team Medic **£220**

KEY FEATURES

VERZERRER
RICE £140
DESCRIPTION Distortion pedal, made in UK
CONTROLS Tone, input level, volume, intensity, bias
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-volt battery or mains supply (not included)
DIMENSIONS 144 x 82 x 65mm
CONTACT fredric.co.uk

7/10 **A fun box of angry splatter that's a bit one-dimensional**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

JHS Pedals Cheese Ball **£179**, Walrus Audio Kangra **£179**, Beetronics Swarm **£269**

infamous Maestro Fuzz-Tone… which may not be an accident.

IN USE

In the nicest possible way, how can anything that looks this naff sound this good? It takes us a while to get the best out of the Regent 150, but once we get there it's a very, very hard pedal to switch off.

There's a lot of top end available here, so the best starting point is with the treble set at zero while the other two controls both point to 12 o'clock. What comes out is a lot like the bypass tone but sweetened up with a sliver of extra zing. From there we can easily move to a gently mid-scooped boost that's easily tightened up by pulling back the bass, or – with our amp set to the sweet spot – something like the focused chime of an Ibanez Tube Screamer or even a Dallas Rangemaster.

There's more, but we don't have room to describe it all. Basically this is a magic-dust sprinkler along the lines of the Hudson Broadcast – maybe not quite so refined, certainly more hissy, but definitely more tweakable and arguably even more addictive.

The Verzerrer is a much simpler proposition: it's just pure nastiness. This pedal nails the splutter-fuzz effect as well as any we've tried, and while the knobs give *some* control over how ratty and pinched it gets, it's limited; and the dip-switches don't really open up any more creative options.

Of course, that's the price of being true to an original circuit from the gloomy side of the Iron Curtain. We're still glad the Verzerrer exists… but not half as glad as we are about its more colourful friend.

DUNLOP

GCJ95 GARY CLARK JR CRY BABY & DB01B DIMEBAG CRY BABY FROM HELL

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

If you think all wah-wah pedals just go 'wah', these two latest signature models from Dunlop's ever-expanding Cry Baby range are different enough to set you straight

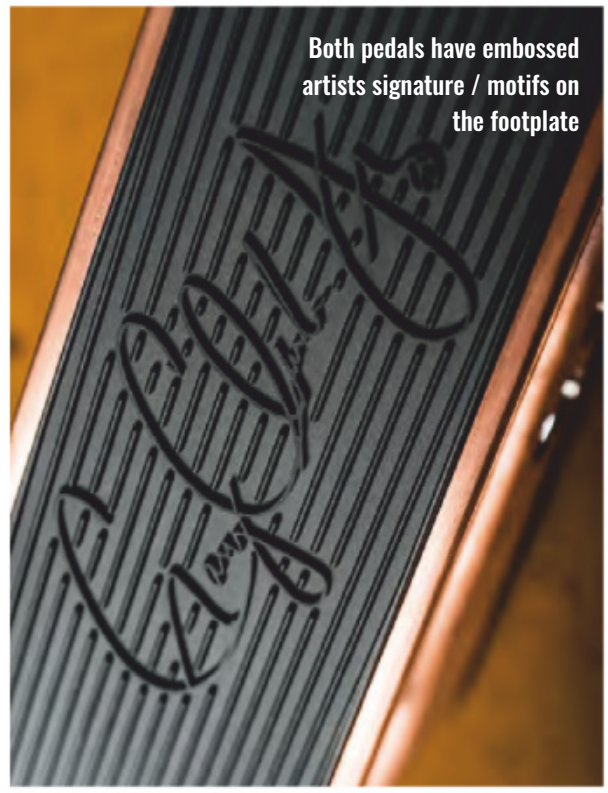
It bounces in and out of fashion like a tennis ball, but the wah effect never completely goes away – and the fact that Dunlop's Cry Baby brand alone has 33 models to choose from right now suggests plenty of guitars are still gently (or not so gently) weeping.

Around half of those Babies are signature pedals, including the two latest launches: one for blues-rocker Gary Clark Jr and one for late Pantera shredder Dimebag Darrell. That's quite a contrasting pair of players, and what we have here is an even more contrasting pair of stompboxes.

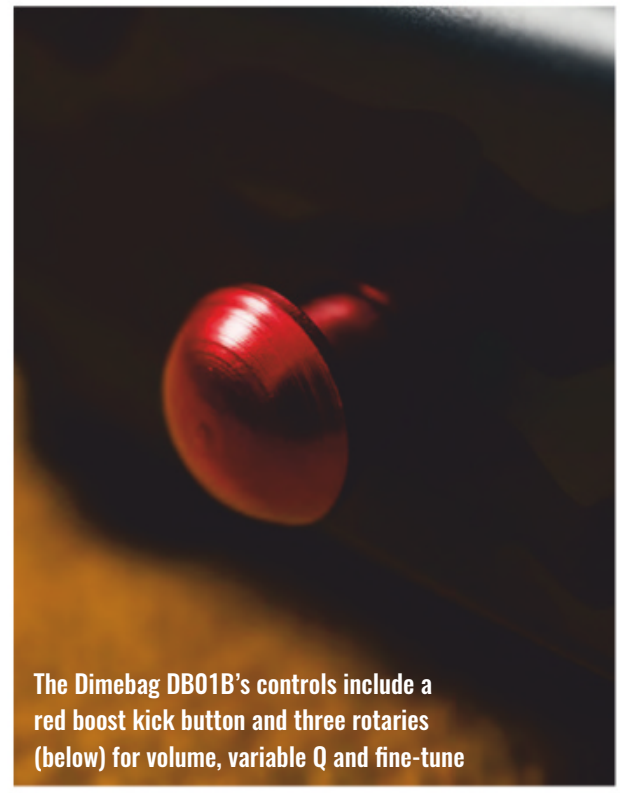
The Clark wah comes in industrial-chic brushed copper while the Dime model is 'camo black', a meaner alternative to the full camouflage original launched in 2004. It's smarter to our eyes… and more apt, as most modern stages are free of tropical undergrowth.

Another contrast? Clark's pedal has no controls at all, but Dimebag's has loads: a six-way frequency range selector, a kick-button on the side to engage a gain boost, plus tiny knobs to fine-tune the range, alter the 'Q' shape of the sweep and adjust the boost's gain. There's also a second output, to send either a treated signal to an effects loop or a dry one to a tuner.

And on the inside? The Clark has a black Dunlop-branded inductor, while the Dime has the famous red Fasel type.



Both pedals have embossed artists signature / motifs on the footplate



The Dimebag DB01B's controls include a red boost kick button and three rotaries (below) for volume, variable Q and fine-tune

IN USE

Dunlop says the Clark pedal has a "lower frequency range" than a standard Cry Baby, but 'lower' is misleading, because this is actually a very bright wah at the top of its travel. What Dunlop means is 'shorter' – it doesn't dive as deep as most, so with heel fully down the sound is focused on lower mids rather than bass. This is great for tight rhythmic playing, and could be useful if you find the darkest part of a normal wah's tonal sweep too muffled.

Here's another feature that needs some explanation: the six-way switch that protudes from the right-hand side of the Dime wah doesn't make the range bigger or smaller, just shifts it up or down. It never gets as sharp at the top, or as midrange-y at the bottom, as the Clark pedal; but in combination with the trio of mini-knobs that sit on the left side, it does offer huge scope for tone-shaping. The Q control is especially nifty, changing how focused the sound is in the middle part of the treadle's travel – that is, how boldly the mids leap out as you pass through.

The gain boost isn't a metal mayhem switch, just a simple full-range boost that gets on super-well with the wah for big solos. It's a pity you can't enjoy the boost without the wah, but that's not really the point. Like its coppery compadre, this is a fine wah built with a style and solidity that will never go out of fashion.

KEY FEATURES

GCJ95 GARY CLARK JR CRY BABY
PRICE £194.99
DESCRIPTION Wah pedal
CONTROLS Bypass switch under toe of treadle
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-volt battery or mains power supply (adapter not included)
DIMENSIONS 252 x 119 x 71mm (with treadle down)
CONTACT Westside Distribution
westsidedistribution.com, jimdunlop.com

8/10 **A solid, classy wah with plenty of cut for percussive playing**

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

KEY FEATURES

DB01B DIMEBAG CRY BABY FROM HELL
PRICE £184.99
DESCRIPTION Wah pedal
CONTROLS Six-way range control, fine-tune and Q; boost footswitch and gain control; bypass switch under toe of treadle
FEATURES Buffered bypass, switchable wet/dry second output; LEDs for wah and boost; powered by 9-volt battery or mains (adapter not included)
DIMENSIONS 252 x 102 x 71mm (with treadle down)
CONTACT Westside Distribution
westsidedistribution.com, jimdunlop.com

9/10 **Much more musical and versatile than the name implies**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Cry Baby 535Q Multi-Wah **£147,** Xotic XW-1 Wah **£299**, Fulltone Clyde Standard **£209**

DUNLOP
AUTHENTIC HENDRIX '69 PSYCH SERIES PEDALS

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Jimi will forever be the guitarist's guitarist – and these four trippy-looking miniature stompers are designed to bring his fuzzed-out, spaced-out magic to modern pedalboards

Some people worship Jimi Hendrix for his mastery of the electric guitar. Some feel he's underrated as a songwriter. And some just see that video of him playing *The Star-Spangled Banner* at Woodstock and want to know how the hell he made all those wild, hippy-scaring noises. If you're in the third group, this colourful quartet of mini-pedals might just have some of the answers.

Dunlop has been putting out products approved by Jimi's estate for some time now, including signature wahs and assorted Fuzz Faces that are actually face-shaped, plus the four full-size Authentic Hendrix pedals on which these units are based. So what's new?

The differences are mostly cosmetic – as well as being titchified, the enclosures have been given a splash of psychedelic colour by British design studio Ilovedust – but two of the four also get some handy bonus features not found on the standard silver-cased models: the Fuzz Face has switchable silicon or germanium distortion plus true or buffered bypass, while the Octavio Fuzz has an option to cut out the octave effect.

These are useful modernising touches, but the four circuits remain rooted in the 60s stompboxes that were such a big part of Jimi's tone: the Dallas-Arbiter Fuzz Face, the Roger Mayer Octavia (aka Octavio) and the Shin-ei Uni-Vibe. Yes, well counted,

The bold new graphics are by UK design studio Ilovedust

The Uni-Vibe delivers one of Hendrix's most recognisable sounds

that's only three – but as well as the original-style Fuzz Face, there's a variant replicating the feistier sound of the red and white unit he used in the Band Of Gypsys era (1969-70).

This tiny footprint doesn't allow room for a battery compartment but, unusually, a 9V adapter for mains power is included in the box with each pedal. In the case of our review samples that's American mains power, unfortunately, but no doubt this will be rectified for UK sale stock.

IN USE

Quite aside from the cult of Jimi, the Fuzz Face is one of the pillars holding up the temple of filth – a reference point for hundreds of fuzz pedals that have followed it. The only question is whether you prefer germanium or silicon flavour; and as Hendrix used both, it makes sense that in this case you can flip between the two.

We suspect there won't be much flipping going on here, though: the germanium fuzz wins out for silky smoothness, but its signal-to-noise ratio is so spectacularly low compared to the silicon transistors that it verges on the unusable. It's lucky, then, that the silicon fuzz is more than sweet enough: deep and gurgly in the classic style, and only too happy to ease off into a fluffy-edged low-gain overdrive tone when you pull back the guitar's volume a couple of notches.

Now, you know how fuzzes often don't like having other pedals ahead of them in the signal chain? That's certainly the case here – running the Uni-Vibe into this unit is a recipe for noise – but engaging the buffer does help with that to some degree. Conversely, if the Fuzz Face is first in line, switching the buffer off kills almost all the background hiss at the expense of just a little crispness. Conclusion: keep it first and don't worry too much about the buffer.

Now we move to the Octavio Fuzz, and at the very mention of that name you're probably thinking of *Purple Haze*. This silicon-based circuit is promised to be the same as it ever was (although the very first ones, according to Roger Mayer, were germanium), but we're keen to find out how it differs from the Fuzz Face when the octave effect is turned off.

Well, we're in the same muddy ballpark, but with a little more grind and less smoothness. This one's happiest when the fuzz control is pushed close to full: the

Despite the intricate designs, these pedals are tiny

midrange takes a dip and instead we move into a boopy, synth-like tone that recalls a Big Muff Pi with the tone down low.

Then we pop the octave on and it really is instant Jimi. We've played modern pedals of this type with a stronger upper octave, and with the effect asserting itself lower down the fretboard, but the wiriness you get when those extra harmonics are only just cutting through is a delight in itself.

Dunlop's boffins reckon the red Fuzz Face that Hendrix used in his later life was in fact a version of the Octavio circuit without the octave… so this Band Of Gypsys Fuzz should sound a lot like where we were a couple of paragraphs ago, right?

Hmm, sort of. The Muff-ish element is there alright, but we seem to have a bit more gain on our hands now. This is a rich and sticky fuzz that loves getting stuck into big power chords, and the tone control gives it some welcome extra flexibility for opening up the top end. It doesn't clean up like the 'real' Fuzz Face, but as an all-round muck-spreader for 21st-century players this is probably the pick of the three.

All of which brings us to the humble Uni-Vibe, which is low on pyrotechnics but high on wobbly wonderment. Like many of the countless other vibe pedals inspired by that original Shin-ei unit, it offers a choice between vibrato and chorus; in reality, both sounds take us to a deeply coloured zone of phasey modulation that lies somewhere between the two.

There's an audible pitch fluctuation in vibrato mode that manages to stay the right side of wooziness, but it's the so-called chorus effect that really hits the 'grin' button. This is the Uni-Vibe sound, no question: an insistently pulsing, not-quite-whining throb that sounds almost like a phaser but with a dash of Leslie and harmonic tremolo thrown in.

For best results, combine with the Band Of Gypsys Fuzz – plus a wah, ideally – then tune up your white Strat, adjust your bandana and prepare to scare half a million hippies all over again.

The Fuzz Face is "an all-round muck spreader for the 21st century"

KEY FEATURES
PSYCH SERIES OCTAVIO FUZZ
PRICE £142.99
DESCRIPTION Octave fuzz pedal
CONTROLS Level, fuzz, octave on/off
FEATURES True bypass;powered by 9V mains supply only (included)
DIMENSIONS 92 x 56 x 44mm
CONTACT Westside Distribution
westsidedistribution.com
jimdunlop.com

8/10 **Retro raucousness with the benefit of a switchable octave**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
Teisco Fuzz **£129**, Bigfoot Engineering Octo Puss Prime **£150**, Roger Mayer Octavia Classic **£239**

KEY FEATURES
PSYCH SERIES BAND OF GYPSYS FUZZ
PRICE £142.99
DESCRIPTION Fuzz pedal
CONTROLS Tone, output, fuzz
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9V mains supply only (included)
DIMENSIONS 92 x 56 x 44mm

8/10 **A great vintage-style silicon fuzz for laying it on thick**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
Electro-Harmonix Nano Big Muff **£67**, EarthQuaker Devices Hoof **£185**, ThorpyFX Fallout Cloud **£185**

KEY FEATURES
PSYCH SERIES FUZZ FACE
PRICE £142.99
DESCRIPTION Fuzz pedal
CONTROLS Volume, fuzz, germanium/silicon switch, buffer switch
FEATURES Switchable true or buffered bypass; powered by 9V mains supply only (included)
DIMENSIONS 92 x 56 x 44mm

8/10 **Old-fashioned fluffy fuzz that cleans up deliciously**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
Dunlop Fuzz Face Mini **£127**, Fulltone '69 MkII **£175**, Analogman Sun Face **$285**

KEY FEATURES
PSYCH SERIES UNI-VIBE
PRICE £142.99
DESCRIPTION Chorus/vibrato pedal
CONTROLS Level, speed, depth, chorus/vibe switch
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9V mains supply only (included)
DIMENSIONS 92 x 56 x 44mm

8/10 **This teeny box pumps out full-size Uni-Vibe modulation**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
Dawner Prince Viberator **£199**, Fulltone Mini Deja Vibe **£255**, Roger Mayer Voodoo Vibe TC **£319**

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DIY WORKSHOP

BUILD YOUR OWN REVERB UNIT

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

No reverb? No problem. We show you how to build an add-on tube-driven spring reverb module based on classic Ampeg and Swart-style circuitry that can be retrofitted to loads of different amplifiers...

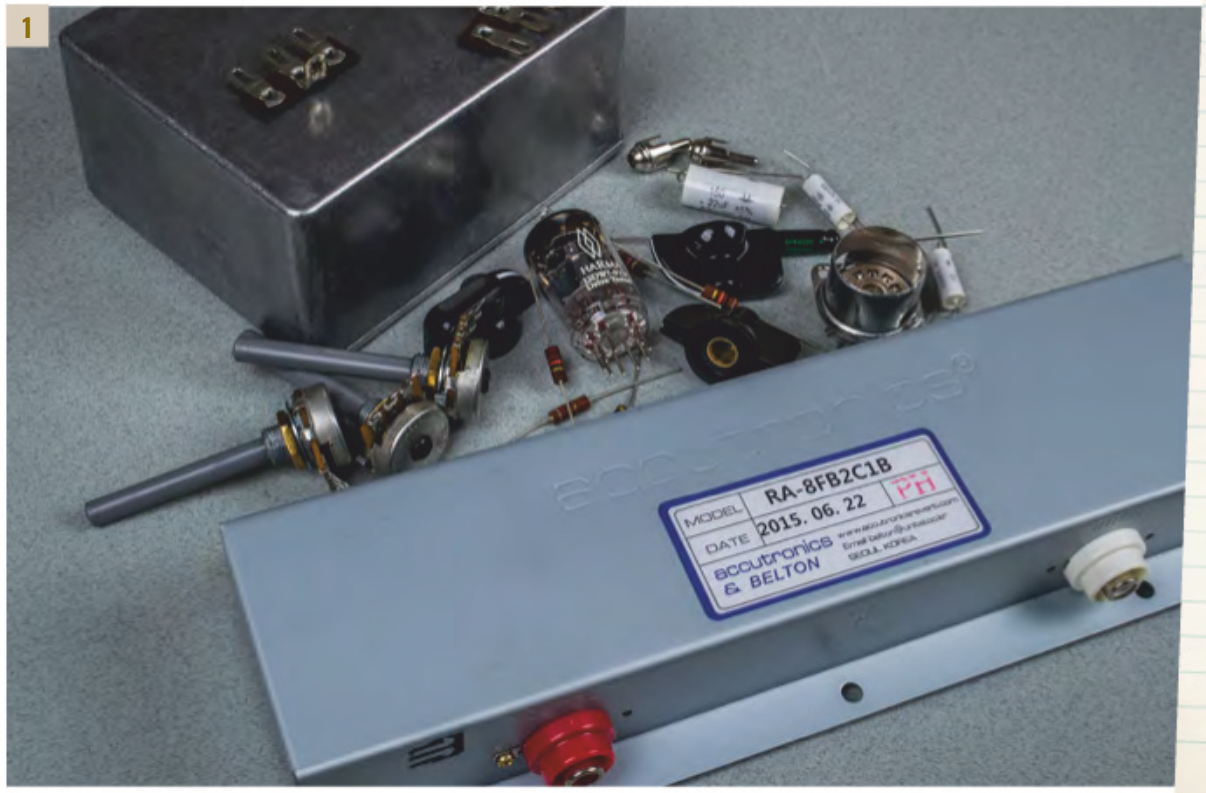
PARTS LIST

RESISTORS
2x 100K
220K
22K
1.2K
470K
3K
10K

CAPACITORS
0.22µF
2x 0.022µF
0.1µF
25µF/25v electrolytic
4700pF
500pF

POTENTIOMETERS
2x 1M
220K

MISCELLANEOUS
Aluminium enclosure
12DW7 valve
2x isolated RCA sockets
9-pin valve socket
Isolated stereo jack socket
3-way tag strip
3x knobs
Strain relief clip for cable
100cm Mogami tube microphone cable
Accutronics 8FB3C1B or 8FB2C1B spring reverb tank



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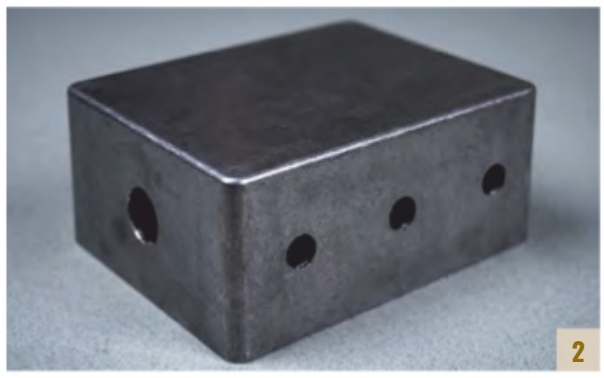
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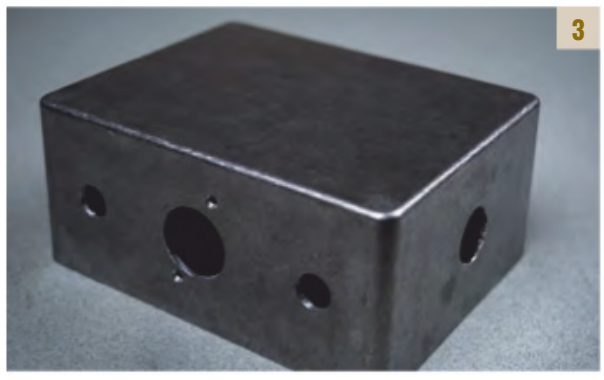
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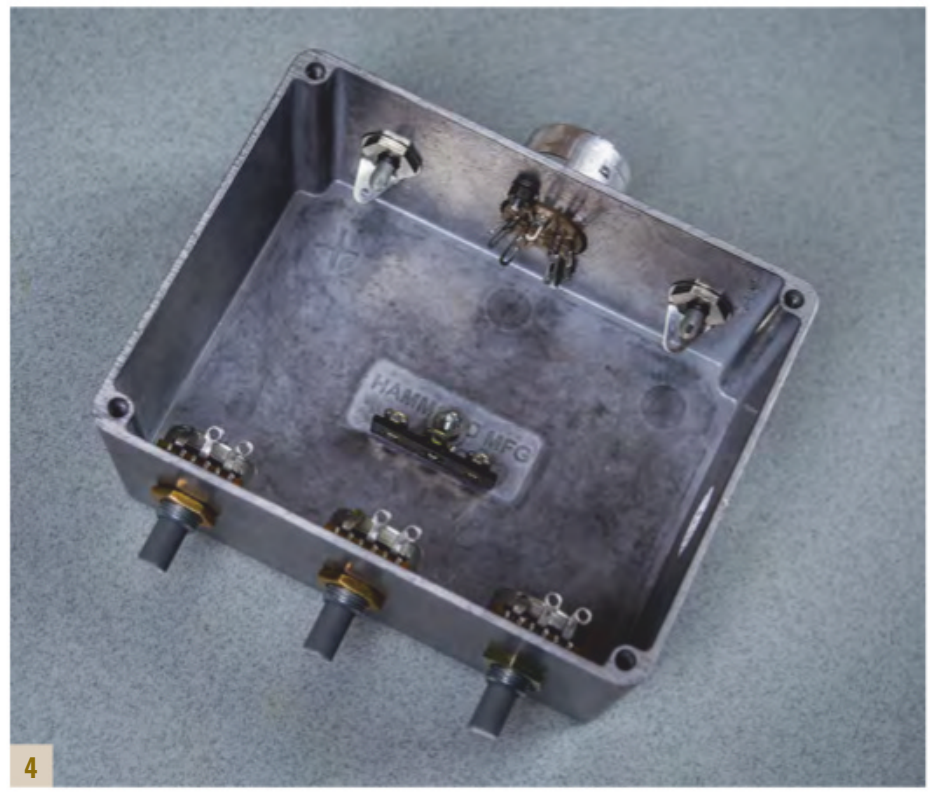
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1 Some of the parts needed for this project, the main items being the 12DW7 valve, the enclosure and the reverb tank itself

2 This side of the enclosure has been drilled out for the three control potentiometers and the cable strain-relief clip

3 This side of the enclosure is drilled for the RCA sockets and valve socket

4 All the hardware is mounted onto the enclosure, but these RCA sockets will be replaced with isolated RCA sockets to eliminate ground loop hum

I've always had an uneasy relationship with reverb. I'm crazy about plate and spring reverb effects in the studio, and always have to take care not to overdo it. But when it comes to the traditional tube-driven spring reverb in most guitar amps, I sometimes find myself less enthusiastic.

I may be in the minority – and I suspect many will disagree with me – but when it comes to Fender reverbs in particular, I often find myself struggling to find that happy medium between too much and too little. There is, however, a style of amp reverb that really does work for me and I first encountered it when I got the chance to review a Swart amplifier.

Swart's reverb really gels with the dry guitar signal to enhance it rather than drown it, and to my ears it sounds more like the AKG studio spring reverbs that I love so much.

So the idea behind this project is to build a Swart-inspired reverb module that can be added to a wide variety of amps.

NEUTRAL SPACE

After checking various online schematics and reverse engineering a friend's Swart, it appears the circuit is actually derived from vintage Ampeg designs. In 1960s Fenders, the reverb send comes after the tonestack, which means the signal already has a 'smiley face' mid-scooped frequency response before reaches the spring tank.

In contrast, the signal is sent to a Swart reverb immediately after the first gain stage. So, a nominally flat frequency signal goes to the reverb. Having passed through the reverb circuitry and spring tank, the wet and dry signals re-convene via 100K mixer resistors. These come just before the second gain stage and have very little effect on signal levels – unlike the whopping 3M3 resistor separating the send and return signals in some Fenders.

This makes the Swart reverb design fully independent, and the amp's volume control operates only on the dry signal. You can even turn the volume right down and listen to the reverb effect on its own.

The Ampeg Reverberocket and Swart reverbs have no transformer and use a single tube. Ampeg employed an octal base 6SN7 dual triode and Swart uses a nine-pin 12DW7 – aka ECC832 – with the one triode being equivalent to a 12AU7 (ECC82) and the other a 12AX7 (ECC83). The low gain/high current 12AU7 side drives the spring tank and the higher gain 12AX7 side is used to recover the signal level that's lost through the tank.

PARTS SMARTS

Another advantage of the Ampeg/Swart approach is the relatively small number of parts required. Besides an enclosure, a handful of components and a valve socket, the only costly item is the reverb tank itself.

There's more to spring reverb tanks than meets the eye and you must choose the right one for any particular application. Fortunately, the seven digit code on all spring tanks provides the information you need.

Swart uses an 8FB3C1B. The first digit tells you the size of the tank and the

5 This Mogami tube microphone cable is used for the high voltage, heater voltage and ground wiring, but not the audio

6 The circuit is wired point-to-point with some components, including the 10K and 470K plate resistors, soldered onto the valve socket

7 All of the ground connections are made to the three-tag strip in the centre of the enclosure

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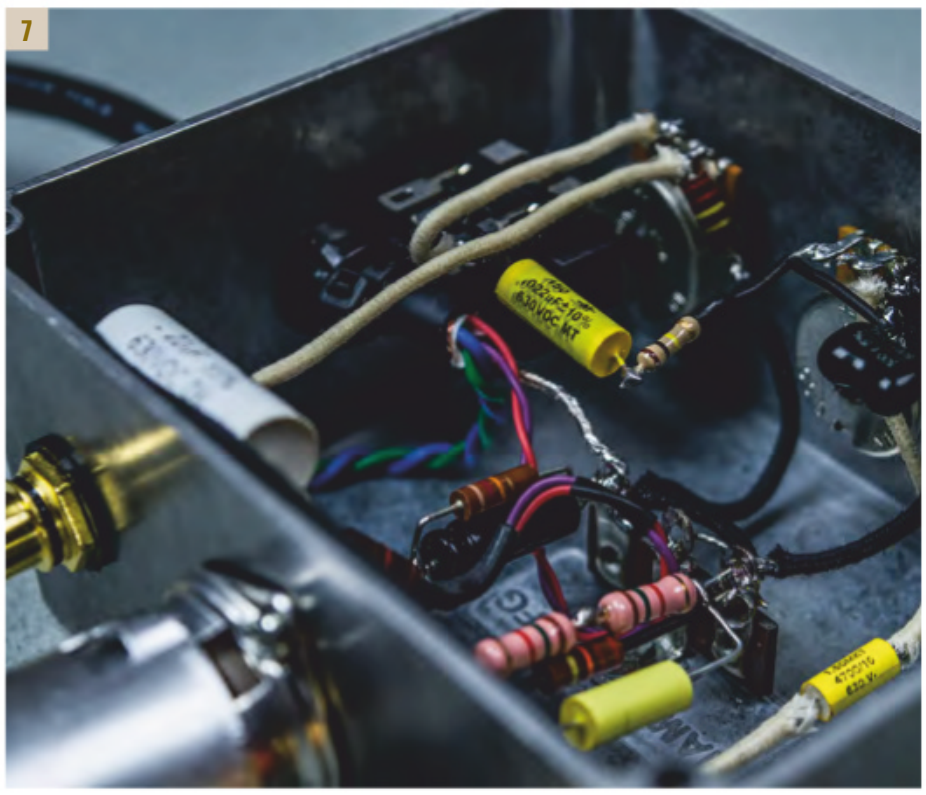
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number of springs inside. Type 8 is the smallest and it contains three springs, which makes it ideal for Swart's compact cabinets. The four-spring Type 4 and six-spring Type 9 are intended for larger cabinets.

The second and third digits give you the input and output impedances respectively and FB denotes 1,475-ohm and 2,250-ohm. Depending on the circuit you're using, and whether there's a transformer involved, the impedance requirements will differ.

The following digit will be a 1, 2 or 3, which gives you the tank's decay time in ascending order – from 1.2 seconds to four seconds. Next up is the connector code, which tells you if the input, output, both or neither is grounded. Apparently, the Ampeg/Swart circuit requires an isolated input and a grounded output.

The penultimate digit tells us there's no locking device for the springs and the final digit tells us how the tank needs to be mounted. In this case, the 'B' signifies that it should be fixed horizontally with the open side downwards.

The 8FB3C1B isn't as easy to find as some, and all the European retailers were out of stock at the time of writing. Rather than order one from the US, I bought an Accutronics 8FB2C1B and I'm hoping the shorter 1.75-3.00 second decay time will suit me fine. Armed with this knowledge, you can also choose a compatible tank for your amp if you don't like the character of the one that came with it.

SPACE CONTROL

Space is restricted on amp control panels, so reverb level is usually the only control you get. But building a reverb *module* means you can add a couple of additional controls, and I'm adapting the circuit for dwell and tone, as well as level. 'Dwell' sets the signal level entering the reverb circuit, and tone is a simple treble roll-off.

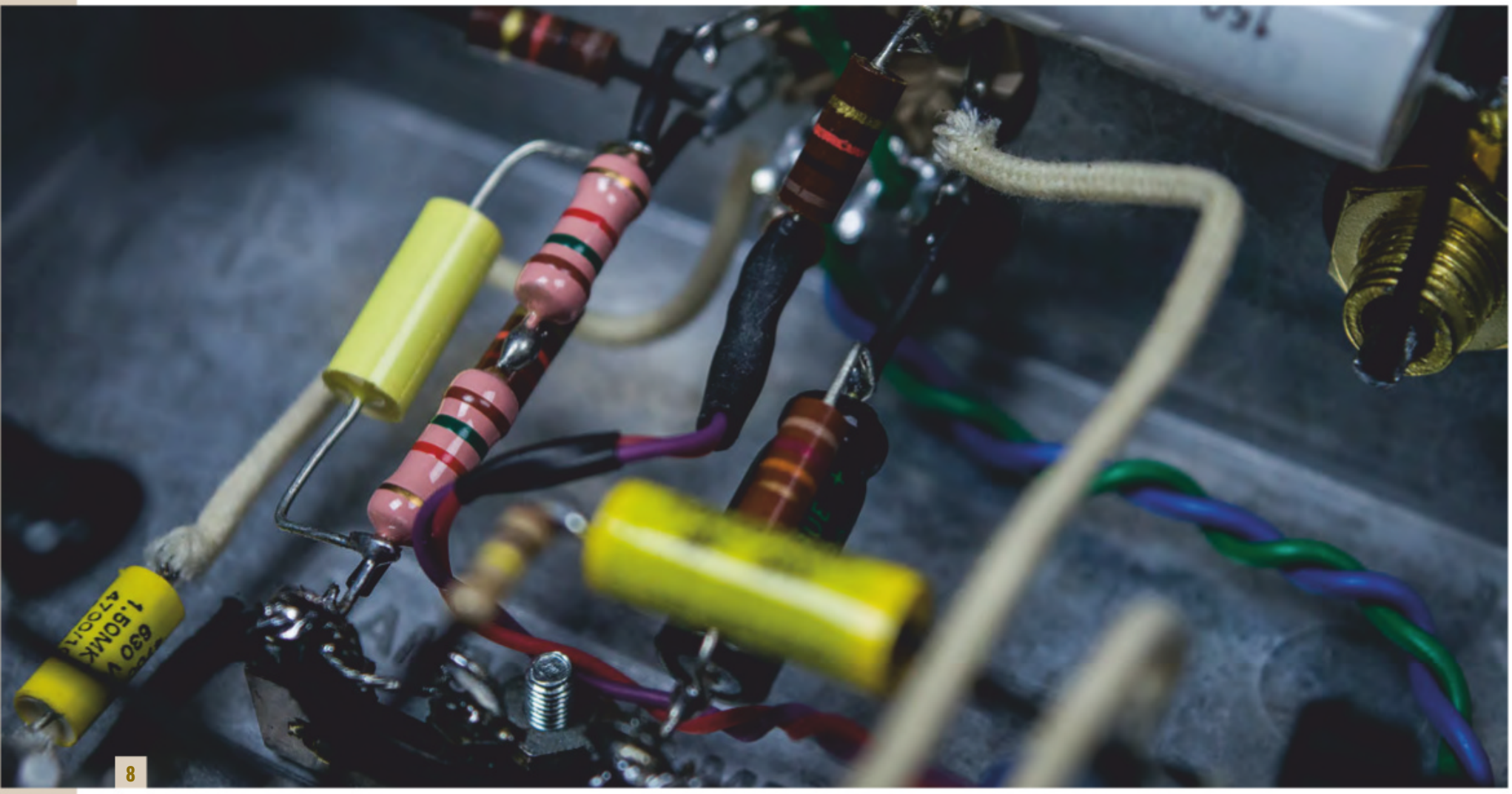
Multiple connections are required for the HT and heater voltages, input and output signals and grounding. I decide to use a length of Mogami Neglex 3172 tube microphone cable, which is widely available online. It's made for exactly the same purpose – namely connecting preamp circuitry and audio signals to a remote power supply.

As such, the colour-coded wires are rated to cope with high current in the case of heater supplies and high voltage for the plates, and everything is screened to minimise noise. I'll be hard-wiring this cable to the internal components and securing the cable to the module enclosure using a strain relief clip.

I mark up the positions for the potentiometers, cable, valve base and RCA socket holes, and drill them all to size using conventional metal bits plus a step cutter for the valve socket hole. I also drill a hole to mount a three-way tag strip onto the rear surface of the enclosure.

LOADING UP

The assembly process will be familiar to anybody who has built effects pedals. I begin by loading up the enclosure with the pots, valve base and RCA sockets for the



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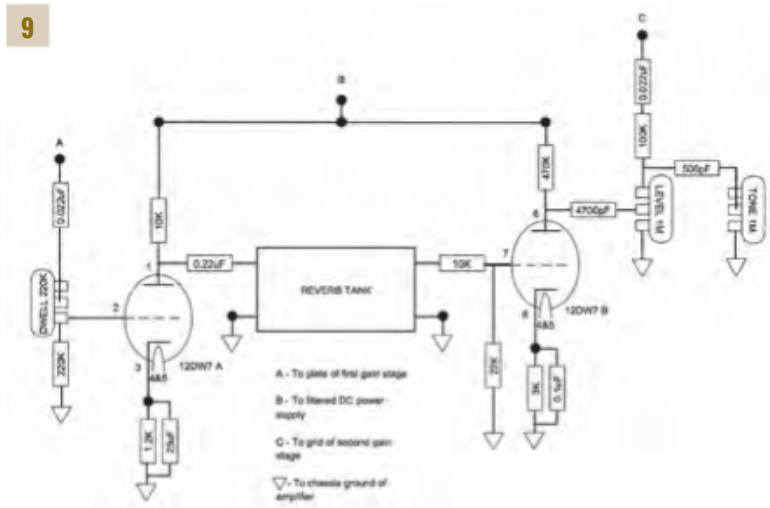

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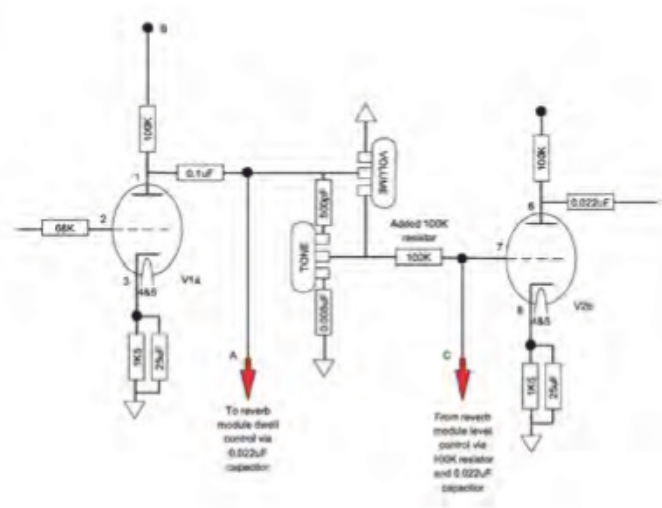

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8 With no 3K resistors in stock, two 1K5 resistors are wired in series between the cathode and ground

9 This is the circuit diagram for the reverb module with added dwell and tone controls

10 This shows how the reverb audio send and return connections are made. NB: go to guitar.com/guides to view and download higher-resolution versions

tank send and returns. The three-tag strip is mounted close to the valve base so it can be used for the ground connections off the 12DW7's cathodes; space is allowed for the cathode resistors and bypass capacitors.

I remove about 100mm of the Mogami cable to expose the wires and secure the cable to the enclosure with a strain-relief clip. The blue and green wires are twisted together, routed around the edge of the enclosure and soldered to the heater pins – blue to pins four and five – and green to pin nine.

Given the circuit's simplicity, it makes sense to wire it point-to-point rather than fabricate a circuit board. The plate resistors are soldered straight onto pins one and six, and I twist the red and purple wires together to carry the HT voltage.

From there, it's simply a case of installing the components and hooking up the controls. The most important connection of all is the ground wire, which in this case is the shield of the Mogami cable, and it's absolutely vital for safety.

HO HUM...

With assembly complete, the next step in the project is to test the module. I decide the ample space inside my Vibro Champ will make this process a lot easier than the rat's nest of wiring inside the Filmosound conversion, which I eventually hope to pair up with this reverb.

At this point the Mogami wires are connected to the Vibro Champ's circuitry 'on the fly', with the heater wire soldered to the heater tags on the 6V6 valve base, and the HT voltage wires onto the power supply after the third stage of filtering.

In tube microphones, the white and orange wires are used to carry audio signals, so the send wire is connected to the plate of V1 (pin one) via a 0.022µF capacitor. A small mod is needed for the return connection, and I solder a 100K resistor between the tonestack output and the grid of the following valve stage (pin seven).

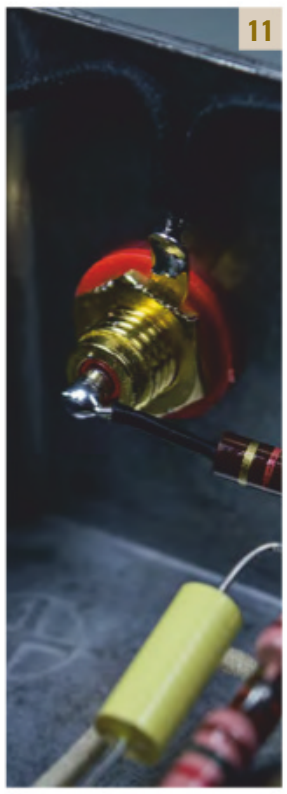
Inside the enclosure, the output of the level pot has a 100K resistor and a 0.022µF capacitor in series. The two 100Ks are mixer resistors for the dry and wet signals. The Mogami ground wire is soldered to the chassis ground of the Vibro Champ.

Using a circuit breaker and my 'light bulb' current limiter, I switch on and measure the voltages inside the module. It all looks good, the valve is glowing orange, and the reverb is working, albeit with slightly more hum than I'm prepared to tolerate.

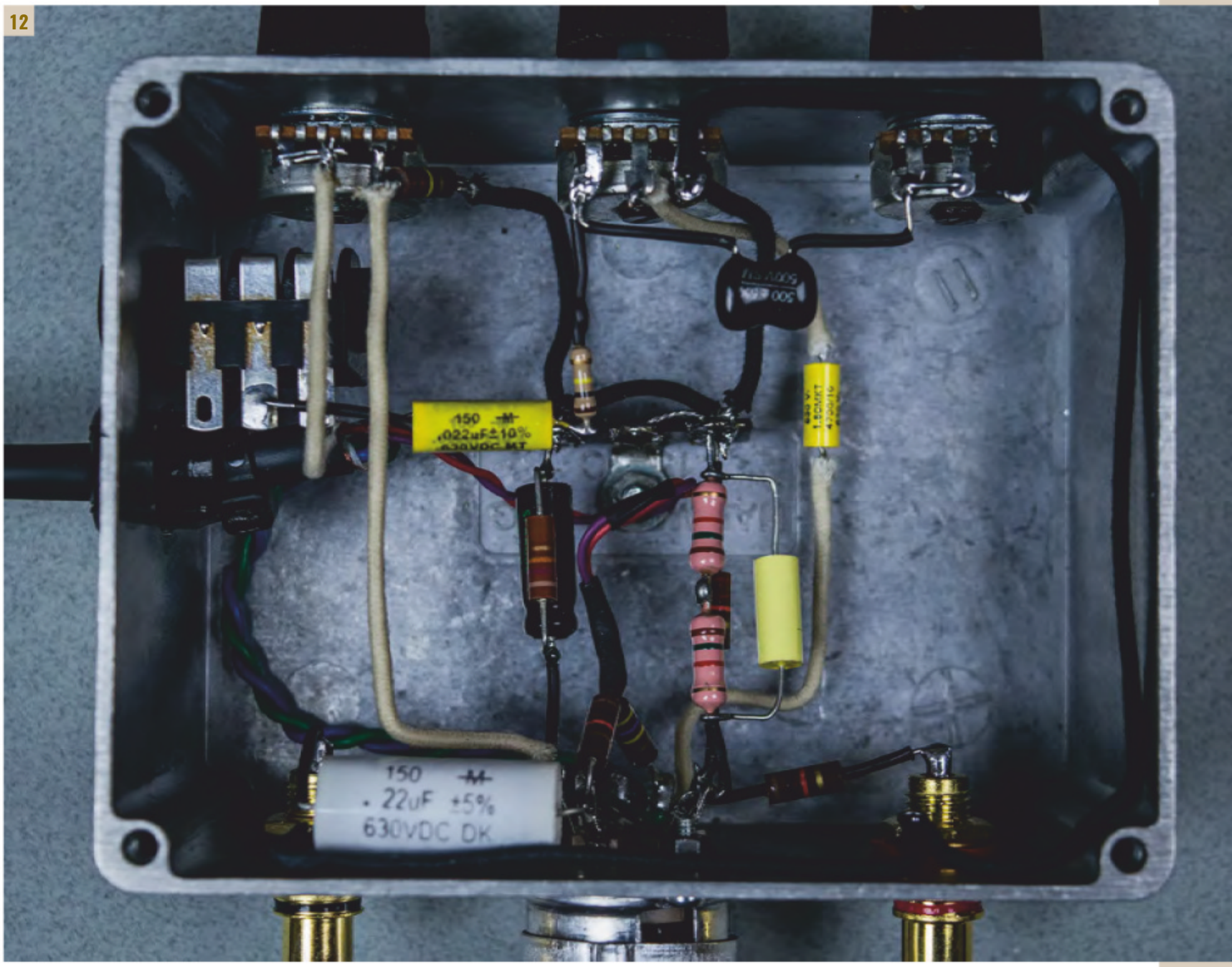
SOUND GROUND

I've often wondered why very few people build these apparently simple reverb module retrofits. Perhaps it's because getting the grounding scheme absolutely right is vital for keeping hum at acceptable levels. Further research indicates that grounding the circuit at a single point seems to be the key.

Do not ground RCA sockets directly to the enclosure or solder the potentiometer grounds onto the casings. Instead, I change the first pair of RCA connectors that are used for the tank send and returns for isolated RCAs. All the circuit ground



11 A pair of gold-plated isolated RCA sockets solved the hum issues



12 When the module construction is complete, it should look something like this!

connections are soldered to the tag strip – with all three tags linked together – and the tag strip is connected to the enclosure via its fixing screw.

The Mogami screen wire is also soldered onto the tag strip inside the module. At the other end it's soldered to the chassis ground inside the amplifier itself and that's the single connection for every grounded point in the reverb module. I also find that using a separate cable for the module send and returns is preferable to routing the signal wires through the Mogami cable – along with the heater and HT voltage wires.

For this, I mount an isolated stereo jack socket onto the module enclosure and it results in the lowest noise. I won't claim this reverb is *entirely* hum and hiss free, but the noise floor is pretty much equivalent to a typical Fender amp reverb – and better than some.

Using a 4700µF capacitor between pin six of the 12DW7 and the level control also blocks low-frequency sonic garbage. You can increase the value if you prefer more low-frequency content in your reverb, but you may get more hum, too.

FINAL FITTING

Having enjoyed the novelty of a Vibro Champ Reverb – albeit with the vibrato valve removed to ensure the power transformer isn't subjected to excessive current draw – it's time to complete the project by hooking it up to my Filmosound conversion.

In the process of re-purposing the amp for guitar use, one of the three 6V6s isn't used. The HT and heater connections inside the amp remain connected to the empty socket, so I can solder an octal plug onto the end of the Mogami cable and make the power and ground connections by plugging it into the unused 6V6 socket. Leak hi-fi power amplifiers and preamps were connected in exactly the same way, and I can be confident that the Filmosound power transformer is up to the task because 6V6s draw more current than 12DW7s.

I also need to install an open-frame stereo jack socket for the audio send and return cable. Rather than drill a hole in the chassis, I decide to disconnect the unused 16-ohm speaker socket, remove the mono jack socket and use the vacant hole for the reverb audio wiring with a stereo jack socket.

I screw the module onto the inside wall of the cabinet and place the tank onto the cabinet base for testing. The reverb is exactly what I had hoped for, and the added dwell and tone controls are well worth having. It's a big, soupy three-dimensional sort of reverb and I find it a lot more versatile than a regular amp type reverb, because it can be very subtle as well as cavernous.

With the tone control rolled back, it's dark and moody, but turn the tone the other way and it can be splashy, too. The dwell control can be set for clean reverb tones, but there's also the possibility of pushing the reverb into overdrive and getting even more splashy and surfy.

Having decided that it's a keeper, the plan is to upgrade the power connections by replacing the 6V6 socket with a four-pin cannon connector that will be safer and easier to use. I'll also buy a bag for the tank, rather than screw it down. Some bespoke RCA-to-RCA cables to link the module to the tank are also needed and I'll add a jack socket for a footswitch at some point.

NOT FOR BEGINNERS

It's worth adding that this reverb can be retrofitted to most tweed-style amps, as well as some Gibson, Vox and Marshall-style circuits – so long as the power transformer can cope with the current draw of an extra valve.

This is not a beginner's level project, but it is easy enough for anybody with a bit of experience in valve electronics. Always remember: voltages in these circuits are dangerous, so if you decide to go ahead, do so at your own risk. Happy surfing!

13

14

13 The power and ground connections are made to the Filmosound amp via an octal plug next to the transformer. The unused 16-ohm speaker output is repurposed for audio send and return

14 The tank is placed in the bottom of the cabinet and the module is mounted on the side for easy access

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Joe Bonamassa: a modern master at improvising new blues licks from the minor pentatonic scale

ESSENTIAL BLUES LESSONS

PART 13 THE MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE, SHAPE 3

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

Continuing our look at the essential tools for the budding blues guitarist, here we take a deep dive into another shape of the humble minor pentatonic…

A few lessons back, we examined the second form of the minor pentatonic scale, and now that we've used these shapes to form a few licks over the last few issues, it's time to take a look at the pentatonic's third variation, and how it interacts with the two we've already covered.

As with any pentatonic, the third shape uses the same intervals, and we'll stick with the key of A for simplicity's sake this time around. This means that the third shape will start on the D note, which is your IV interval in the scale, and you'll find this at the 10th fret of the low E string.

TRY IT YOURSELF

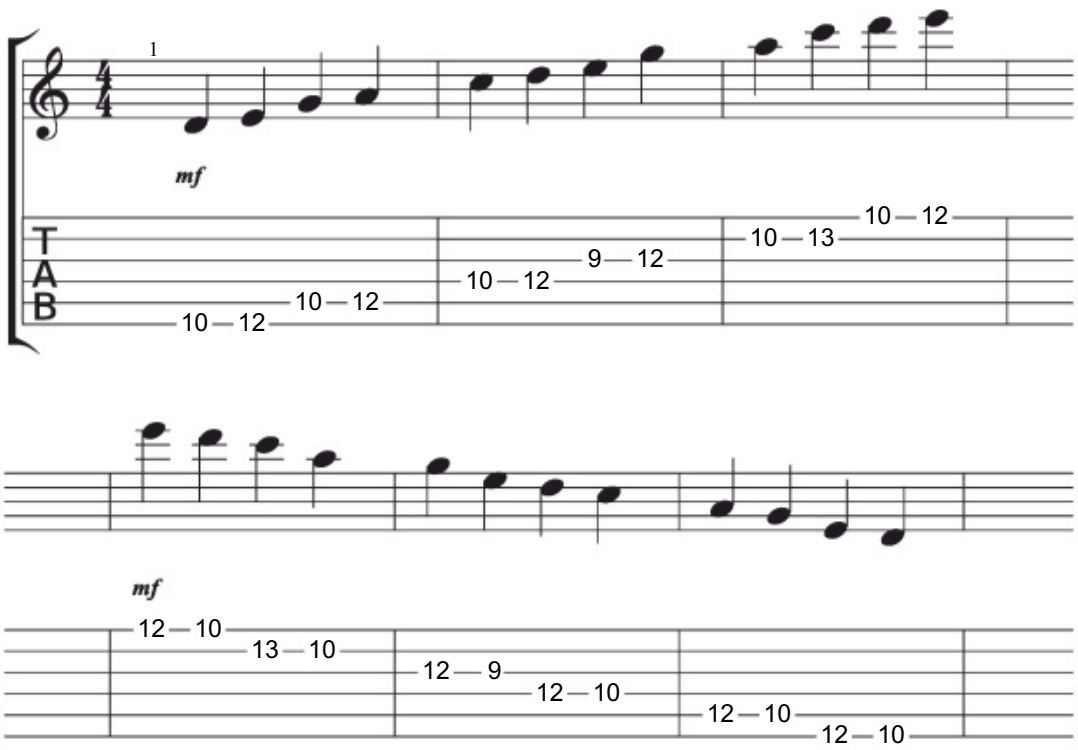
The layout of the fretboard allows scale shapes to be transposed around the guitar at will. The shape in this lesson is in A minor, but this can be moved to any other key around the fretboard. When transposing the second shape, don't forget that it's relative to the root note of the first shape. This means when moving it into another key you will be starting from the third note of the initial shape but located along the low E string!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK. He has taught hundreds of students face to face and via the MGR Music platform. He has over 10 years' experience working in the industry as a touring musician, session guitarist and teacher. www.mgrmusic.com

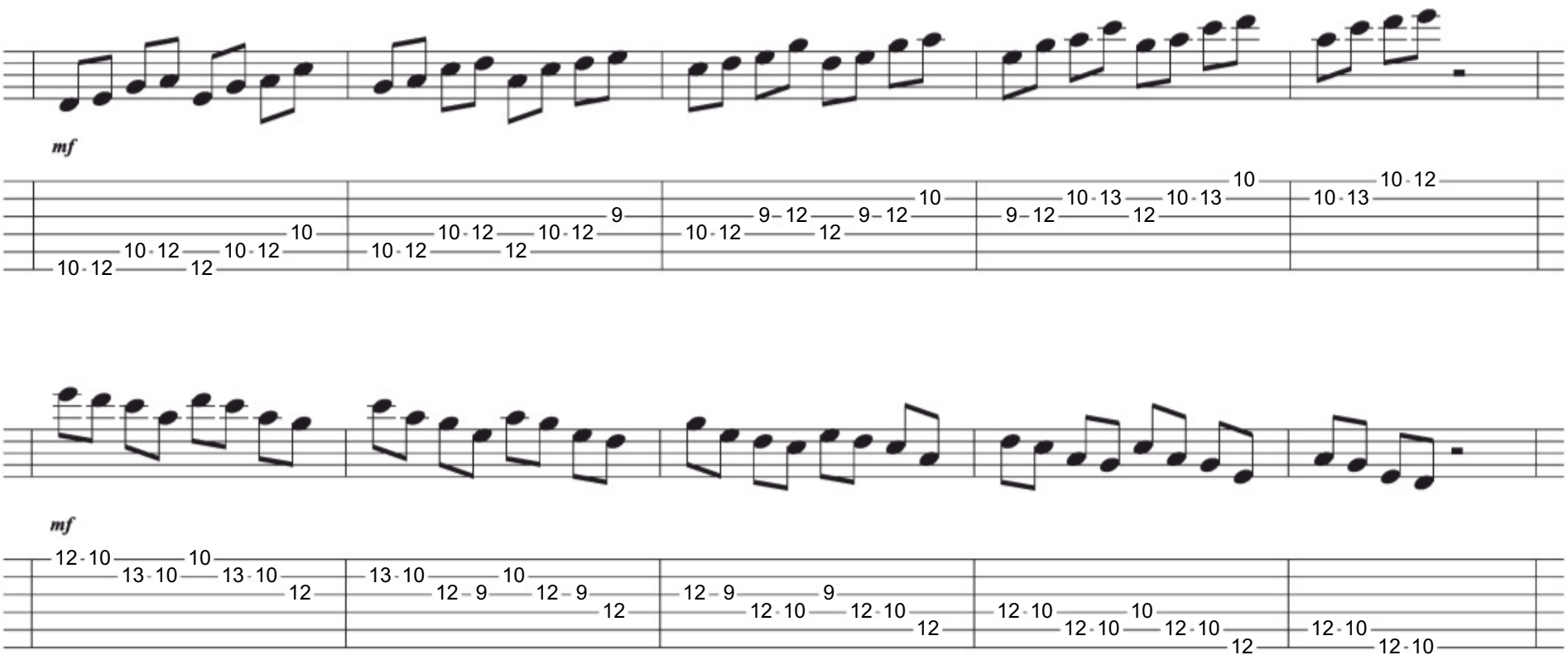
EXAMPLE 1

As with the other scale shapes we've learned, it's useful to spend some time familiarising yourself with this in ascending and descending groupings. The shape of this scale is a little more difficult to get to grips with, so take your time. The G and B strings are the main challenge, as you'll see a position shift is needed to play these notes cleanly.



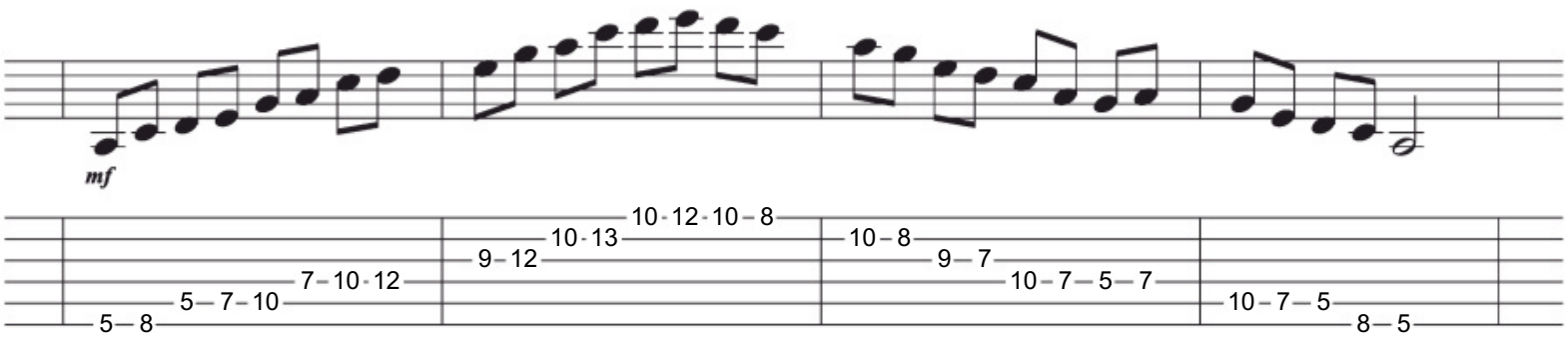
EXAMPLE 2

Now that you have three shapes of the scale under your fingers, you'll be able to cover a lot of fretboard area – when playing across multiple forms of the same scale, it's a good idea to get used to how these link together. Here are some example patterns of how you can integrate notes across all three shapes in one run.



EXAMPLE 3

This example encourages you to start to associate the fretboard locations of the shapes relative to the first shape.
This run won't sound very bluesy, but it will allow you to start to gain some ideas around linking shapes together.



EXAMPLE 4

This final run is a great picking pattern that uses two strings at a time, moving down the shape before crossing over into shape two towards the end. This exercise is great for working on pattern-based playing and also your picking technique, however, this sort of 'moving box' form appears in a lot of players' repertoires. For example, Joe Bonamassa approaches this with a moving pattern when he is looking for a speedy pentatonic flurry.

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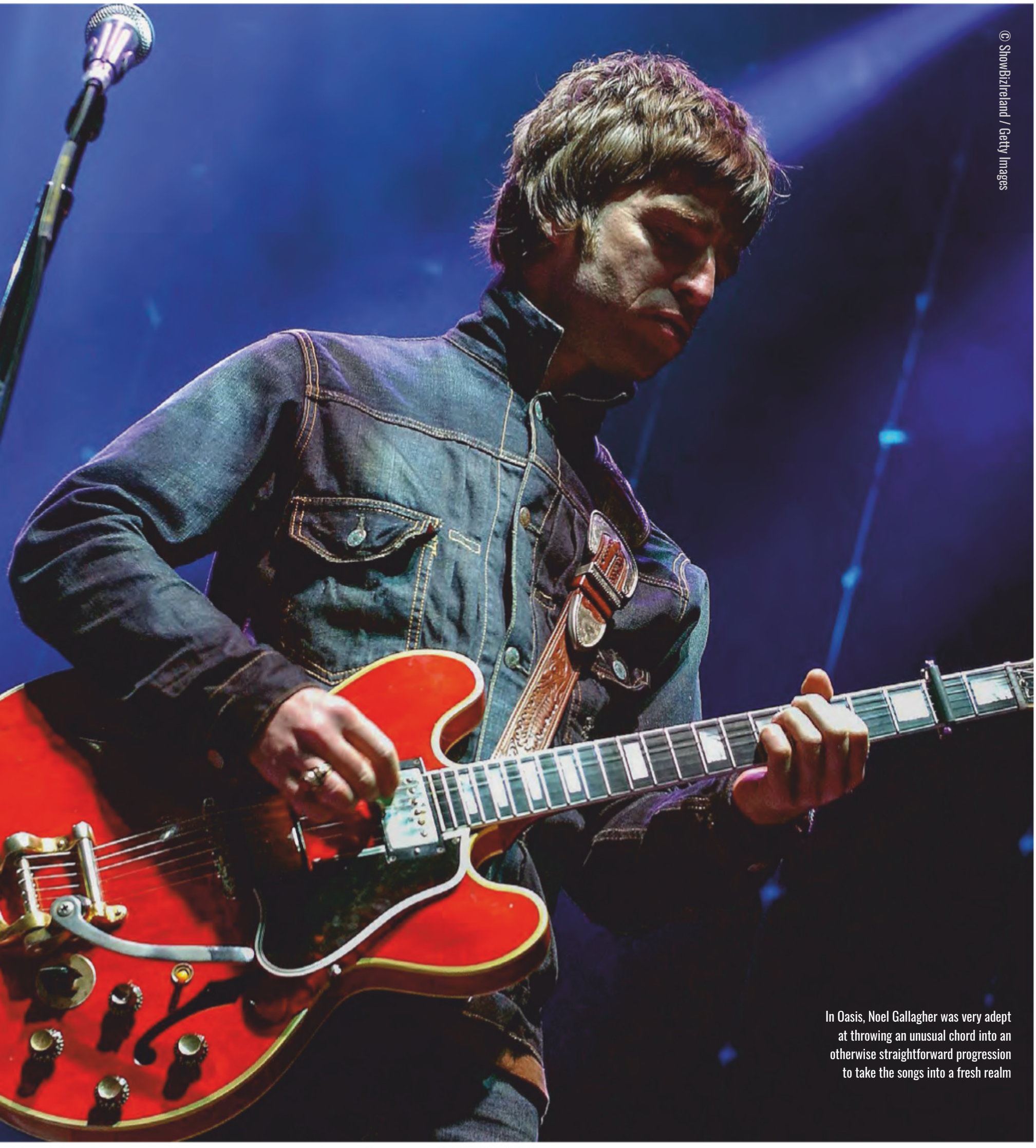

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In Oasis, Noel Gallagher was very adept at throwing an unusual chord into an otherwise straightforward progression to take the songs into a fresh realm

CHORD CLINIC

HOW TO PLAY CHORDS LIKE NOEL GALLAGHER

WORDS ROD FOGG

Former Oasis star Noel Gallagher is a man who knows a thing or two about penning a hit, and the bedrock of it all was his clever approach to chords and songwriting…

Noel Gallagher's knack for a hooky chord progression was at the heart of the stratospheric success that Oasis enjoyed from their lightning in a bottle 1994 debut *Definitely Maybe* to their acrimonious split 15 years later. The varied solo work the 52-year-old Mancunian has produced since proves that he's still got plenty of hooks left in the tank, but for this lesson we're going to take a look at the techniques he used when he was in his Oasis pomp as a true rock 'n' roll star…

FIGURE 1

Here we introduce a simple but effective chord sequence based on moving a shape around the guitar. The idea is to play an arpeggio on the B7add11 chord keeping to the middle four strings, but just occasionally adding in the slight clash of the open E string. Then slide the shape up to the 7th fret where it becomes E7 and continue as before. You can add the open E again if you like, but we prefer it without. Go back and forth between these two chords and then to complete the sequence strum a bar of F♯ and then crash into the E chord, holding it for four beats.

You can repeat ad-lib, and try recording it and adding a solo. It has a similar flavour to a blues, but with an altered progression.

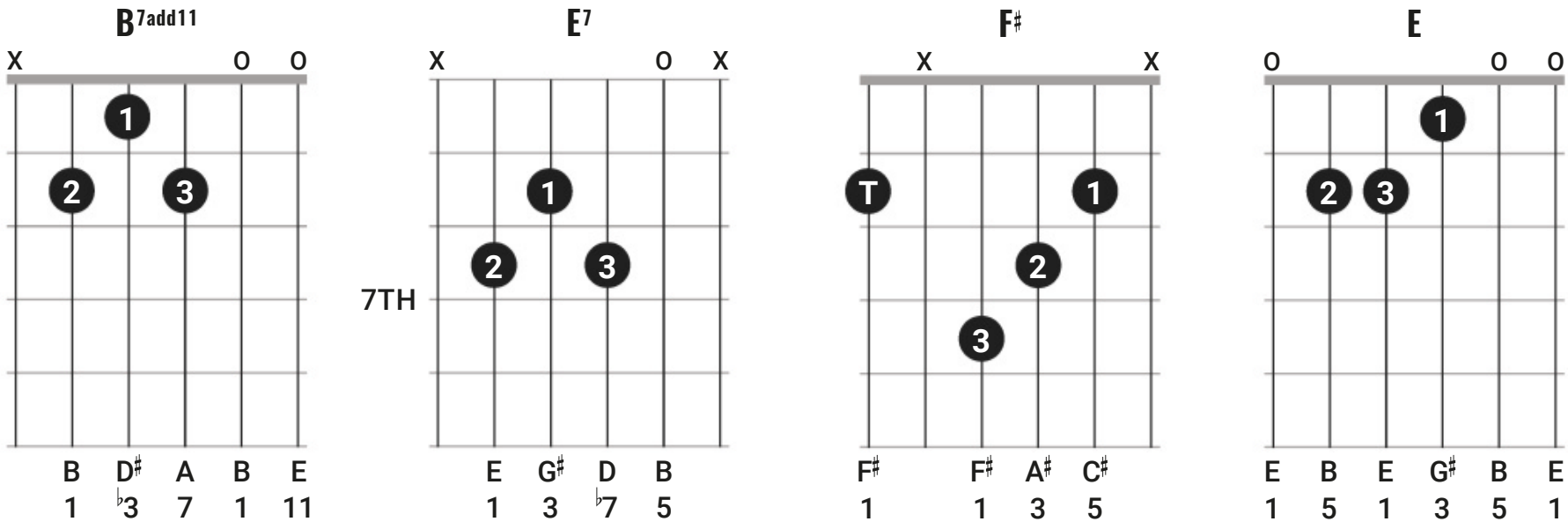

FIGURE 2

Throwing one unusual chord into a sequence that' s otherwise straightforward is a great way to take a song somewhere unexpected, and make a routine set of chords suddenly seem like the best thing since anybody thought of root, third and fifth. Cue the first four chords of figure 2, which make a useful four-bar sequence. It's a bit like the I-V-VI-IV except here we have A minor, chord II, where chord VI usually goes.

We've deliberately chosen the full-fat barre chord approach here – this is the kind of part you could imagine being played on rhythm guitar, and it's meant to be heavy.

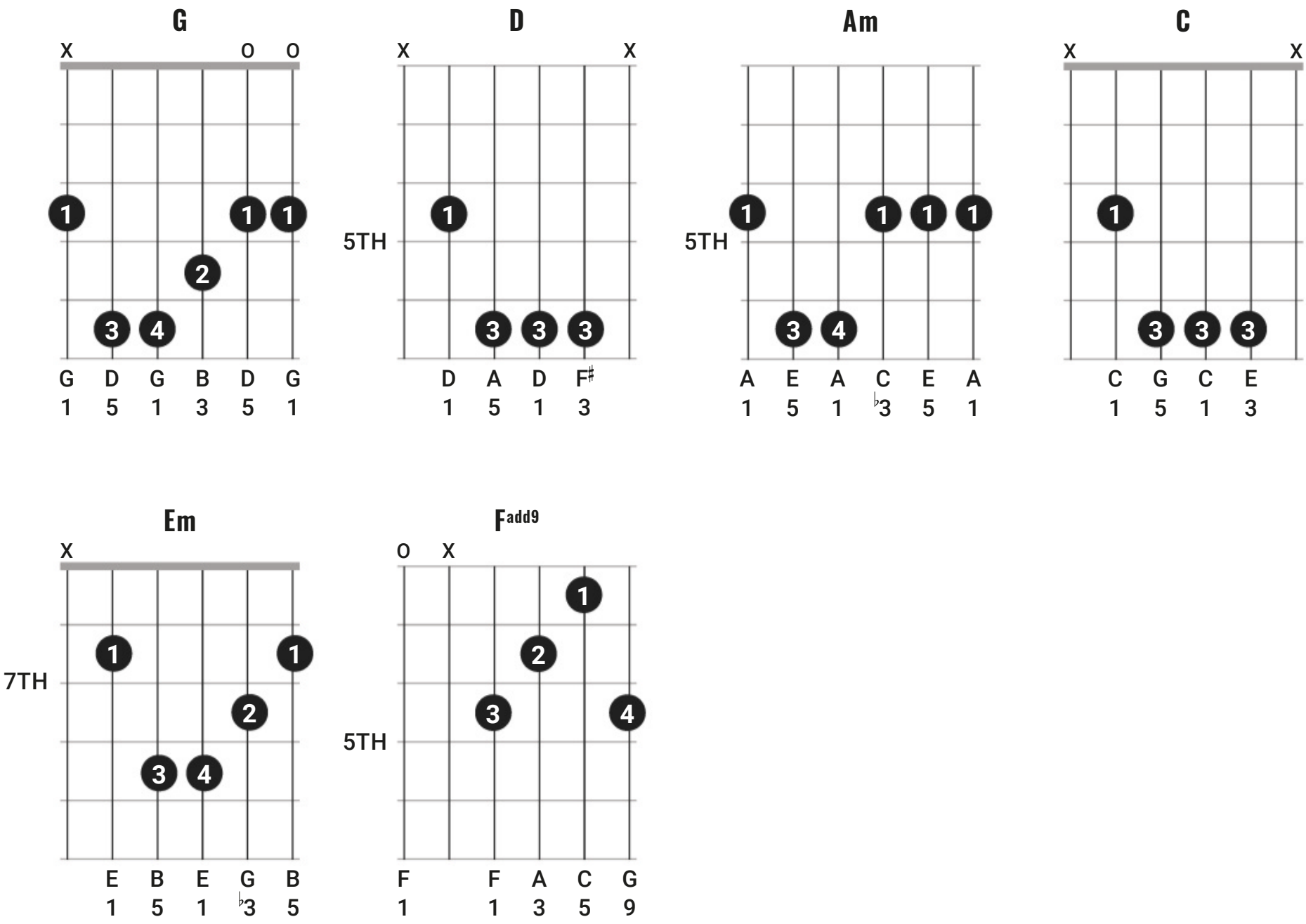

FIGURE 3

This works really well played over figure 2. Try adding the high three-note voicings of G, Gsus4, G over the G barre chord, and so on with the D/Dsus4 and A minor/Amadd9 chords. You could try breaking them up into arpeggios or use downstrokes and let them ring.

On the C major chord, join in on the barre chord or alternatively figure out the D/Dsus4 two frets lower (that means nearer the nut) to play C/Csus4. This is the kind of top part that Noel often adds, broadening out the sound and adding colour to the basic chords.

For a B section, we could add in the E minor chord, playing Em, D, Am, and then squashing C and D into the fourth bar, using the barre chords from figure 2. This is where the interesting stuff happens. Play this four-bar sequence two or four times and last time through leave out the C and D chords and go for the Fadd9 instead. This is the 'wow' sound from outside the key and is built on the flattened seventh (F relative to the key of G), and the added ninth just makes it even better.

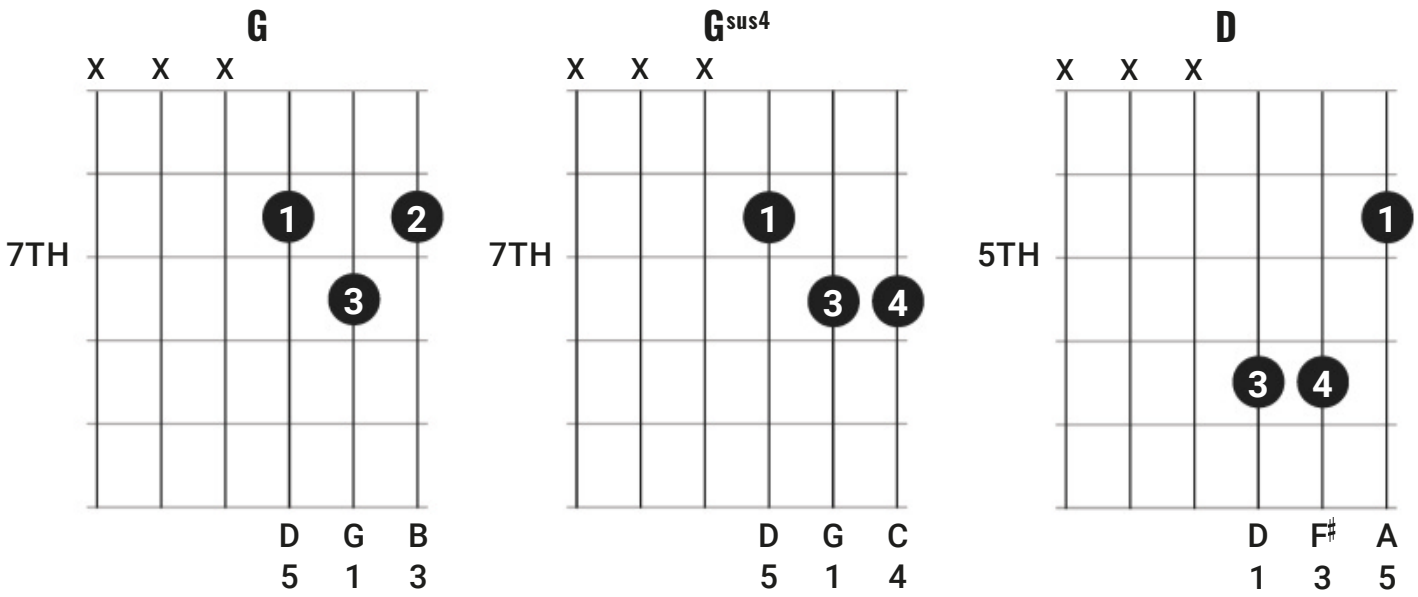

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FIGURE 4

Here we again have an unusual chord (F♯m11) played in a sequence with regular major chords. If you were to have whole sequences of minor 11ths or ninths (or major sevenths etc) you'd get something much jazzier. This may be why majors, minors, sus and added note chords dominate most rock music. Notice that the 7th and 11th are both open strings in this F♯m11 voicing, adding extra crunch.

Try playing the minor 11th as an arpeggio. Experiment with adding open strings to these two chords too, and with playing them as arpeggios. Don't play too pretty, though – that's not Noel's style.

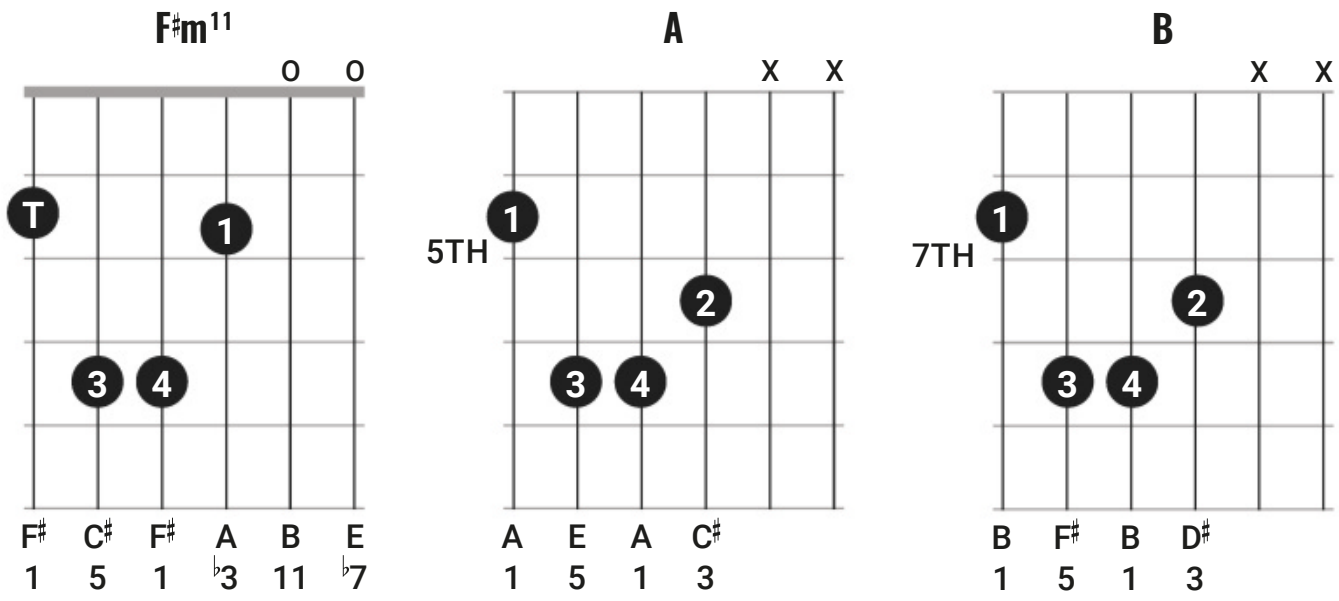
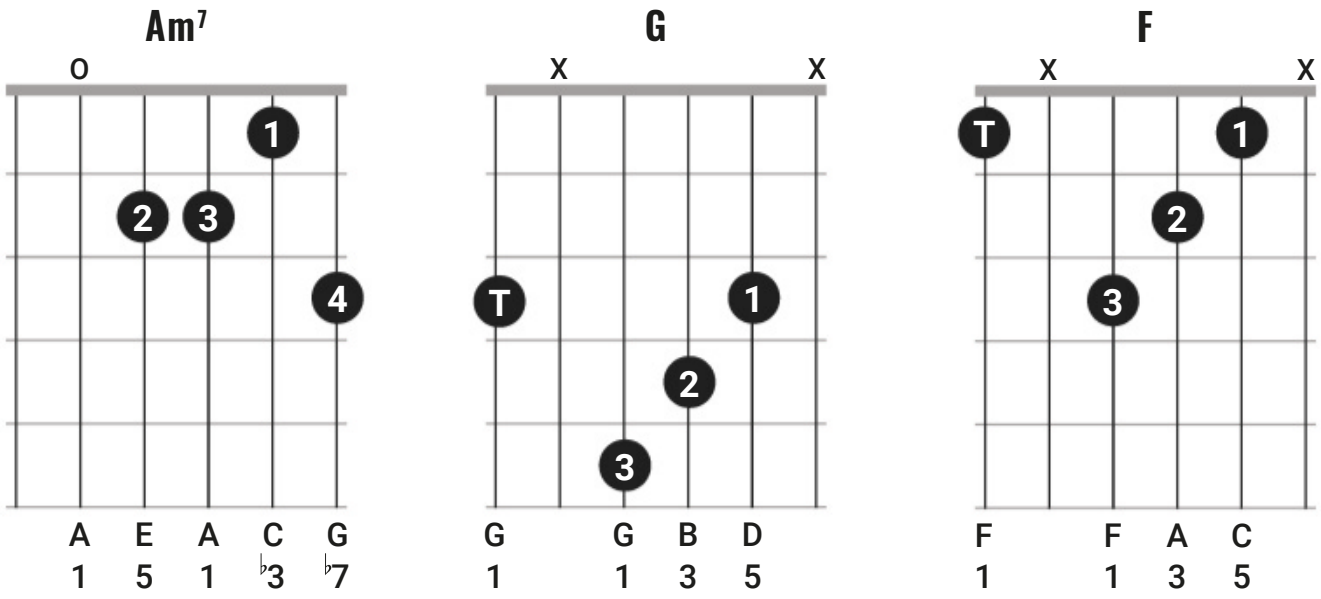


FIGURE 5

Our final sequence mines a similar vein, this time starting with an A minor seven chord followed by two 'thumb over' chords, in which the fret-hand thumb edges over the top of the neck and traps the E string at the first or third fret. If that's tricky for you, other fingerings are available, such as the first finger on the sixth string and the other three fingers on strings two to four. You could also substitute six-string barre chords – though they will sound much heavier than you'd want for this kind of feel.



Rod Fogg is a London-based guitarist, teacher, and writer. He is the author of *The Ultimate Guitar Course* (Race Point 2014), the *Electric Guitar Handbook* (Backbeat, 2009) and contributed to best-seller *The Totally Interactive Guitar Bible* (Jawbone Publishing, 2006). Find out more at rodfogg.com

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PETRUS DU PLESSIS

INTERVIEW JOSH GARDNER

The two-time Premiership-winning rugby star on pointy axes, spreading the guitar playing gene around the Glasgow Warriors' clubhouse, and forming an all-star rugby player band for a very good cause…

The moment it all started...

"I don't want to go into too much detail, but… I might have been a bit naughty at school! When I was 16, I was sent home for a week and my parents said, 'Right, you're not leaving the house!' We had a guitar in the house, so I just sat in my room for that week and started to learn some chords. There were a couple of guys in my school who were already playing, and it became a bit of a challenge between us seeing who could play the biggest metal riffs and all that stuff.

"About six months later I was at a level where you could actually recognise the songs, and then from then I just started buying different guitars and learning different styles of music.

"Obviously, it's been very on and off since then, being a professional rugby player, but there's nothing better than spending a bit of time playing the guitar."

I couldn't live without my...

"I really love my Jackson Randy Rhoads. I love a guitar with a really skinny neck, and that's just become my absolute go-to. I like that it looks a bit different, and it's so much easier to get all the way up the neck, which is really important for me."

The one that got away...

"I've been thinking about getting a Gibson SG for a while now, and I went to Guitar Guitar here in Glasgow and I played a load – from the most expensive one, about £7,500, to the most affordable. None of them sounded or played quite as good as this one that was about 1,500 quid. I even tried an ESP one, but the neck was too wide for me – but for some reason, I didn't get the Gibson. In terms of ones that got away, I sold my Telecaster… but I sold it to one of my teammates here, so I like to think that I'm just passing the guitar gene on!"

My signature guitar would be...

"Oh, I would have a body that was literally like four points going in every direction! Lee [Jones, Warriors and Scotland winger] is sitting here shaking his head because he's more of the 'traditionally beautiful' Gibson and Fender shape… I'm just crazy, so I'd go for something that is just totally out there and has as many sharp angles as it can."

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...

"I'll warm up with Metallica's *Master Of Puppets* or *Fade To Black* – there's a nice blend of the intricacies of the picking parts and then the fast strumming, so it's great to get the fingers moving!

"In terms of this charity gig that myself and some of the Glasgow players are doing in February though, we're probably not going to go too mad – we're going to focus on the crowd-pleasers. We want the crowd to sing along!"

My Spinal Tap moment

"Ask me that again after 15 February when we play this gig, mate! But no word of a lie, if I am even slightly tipsy I cannot play guitar to save my life – I just get a brain block! I'm sitting there thinking, 'How do you play that Oasis song again…?'

"I get a lot of those moments actually, where I pick up a guitar and someone's like, 'Oh, play us a song' and I just can't think of anything! Lee actually seems to find it a lot easier and the songs just fall out of his fingers, but it takes me about 20 minutes to get into it."

I'm in the band...

"First, you'd have to make it so I was good enough to be in the band, because at the moment I'm not going to make it in any of them! But if that was the case I'd probably have to choose one of my three favourites – Metallica, Iron Maiden or Queen."

The most important thing on my rider...

"Oh, I think you've gotta go proper, old-school rock 'n' roll on that rider, don't you? Actually, the thing that most appeals to me, is that I imagine it would be really fun to be on a tour bus."

My guilty pleasure...

"I only feel guilty about this because I've been playing it for so long, but the first thing I ever learned was *Nothing Else Matters* and I still just *love* playing it today. It just sounds so good when you sit down and play it on an acoustic, I can't help it!"

Petrus and fellow Glasgow Warriors players Callum Gibbins, Lee Jones, Ryan Wilson and Adam Ashe play at the Hard Rock Café, Glasgow on 15 February 2019, in aid of the Glasgow Children's Hospital Charity. Tickets are £15, available from tickets-scotland.com

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